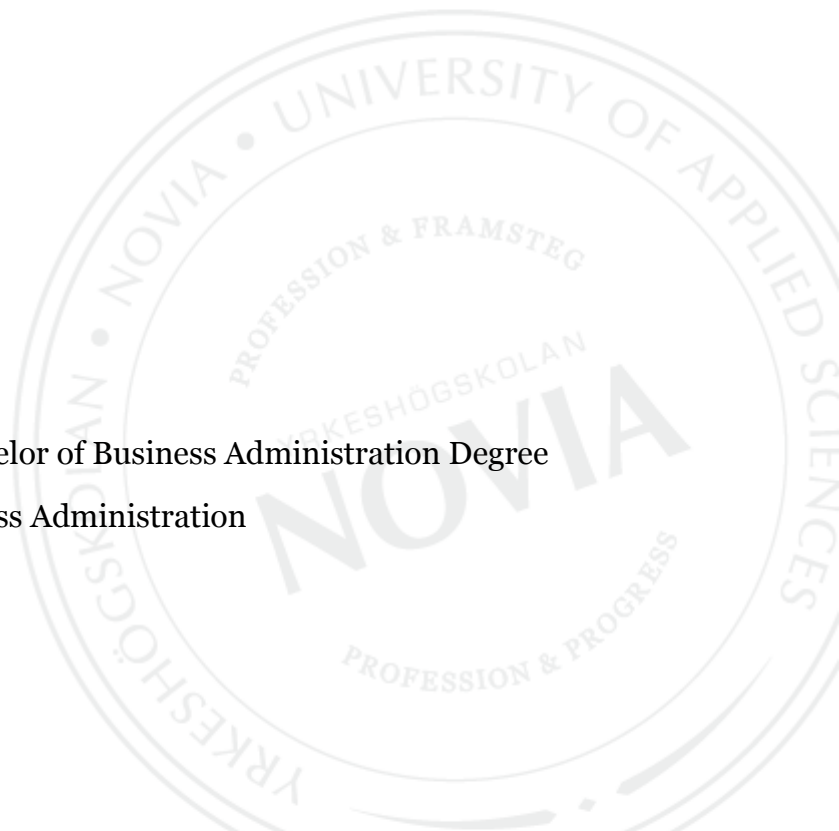


# **"Something different"**

## **Exchange students' experiences about Team Novia**

Anni Santero

Bachelor's Thesis for Bachelor of Business Administration Degree  
Degree Program in Business Administration  
Turku 2014



## **BACHELOR'S THESIS**

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### **Abstract**

This Bachelor's Thesis is written as an assignment for Novia University of Applied Sciences' International Unit in Turku. My motive for the implementation of the thesis is my personal interest towards the topic as well as the lack of previous research information.

The object of the work is to build a comprehensive overview of how incoming exchange students experience Team Novia as a learning unit as well as to discover what kind of developing idea they have concerning Team Novia. The central point of interest is also to find out what factors affected the choice of Team Novia as an exchange destination and how the experienced overall quality of the student exchange has met with expectations that were set for the exchange time.

Theoretical framework of the work consists of internationalization in higher education, service approach in higher education as well as Team Learning.

The research was conducted by using qualitative thematic interviews. The study involved ten respondents, who, by the time study was implemented, had studied at least one semester in Team Novia.

Results of this work are interesting and provide starting points for the future development work. In summary it can be said that incoming exchange students in Team Novia are satisfied with their experiences, but there is still need for improvements.

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Language: English

Keywords: Team Learning, Team Novia, Student Exchange, Exchange Students, Internationalization in Higher Education, Service approach in Higher Education

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## EXAMENSARBETE

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Titel: "Någonting annorlunda" Utbytesstuderandenas erfarenheter om Team Novia  
/ "Something different" Exchange students' experiences about Team Novia

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### Abstrakt

Examensarbetet är skrivet som ett uppdrag för Yrkehögskolan Novias internationella enhet i Åbo. Motivet för att genomföra examensarbetet är mitt personliga intresse för ämnet, samt brist på tidigare forskningar.

Syfte med arbete är att bilda en omfattande helhetsbild om utbytesstuderandenas erfarenheter i Team Novia samt att ta reda på hurdana utvecklingsförslag de har för hela Team Novia. Det huvudsakliga intresse är också att ta reda på vilka faktorer som påverkat valet av Team Novia som en utbytesdestination och hur utbytesstuderandenas upplevda kvalitet motsvarar deras förväntade kvalitet.

Teoretisk ram för arbetet består av internationalisering inom högre utbildning, service perspektiv inom högre utbildning och Team Learning.

Undersökningen genomfördes med hjälp av kvalitativa temaintervjuer. I undersökningen deltog tio respondenter och alla respondenter hade studerat minst en termin i Team Novia vid den tidpunkten då undersökningen utfördes.

Resultaten av undersökningen är intressanta och ger utgångspunkter för framtida utvecklingsarbete. Sammanfattningsvis kan konstateras att Team Novias inkommande utbytesstuderanden är nöjda med sina erfarenheter de fått, men förbättringar kan ändå ske.

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Språk: engelska

Nyckelord: teaminläring, Team Novia, studerandeutbyte, utbytesstuderande, internationalisering i högre utbildning, serviceperspektiv i högre utbildning

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## OPINNÄYTETYÖ

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### Tiivistelmä

Opinnäytetyö on tehty toimeksiantona Yrkeshögskolan Novian Turun toimipisteen kansainväliselle toimistolle. Motiivina työn toteuttamiselle toimii henkilökohtainen kiinnostus aihepiiriä kohtaan sekä aikaisemman tutkimustiedon puuttuminen.

Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on rakentaa kokonaisvaltainen katsaus vaihto-opiskelijoiden kokemuksista Team Novialla sekä selvittää, millaisia kehittämis ehdotuksia heillä on koskien Team Noviaa. Keskeinen kiinnostuksen kohde on myös selvittää, miksi vaihto-opiskelijat valitsivat juuri Team Novian vaihtokohteeksi ja millä tavalla vaihto-opiskelulle asetetut odotukset kohtasivat koetun laadun kanssa.

Työn teoreettinen viitekehys käsittelee korkeakoulutuksen kansainvälistymistä, korkeakoulutuksen palvelunäkökulmaa sekä tiimioppimista.

Tutkimus on toteutettu käyttäen kvalitatiivisia teemahaastatteluja. Tutkimukseen osallistui kymmenen vastaajaa, jotka olivat tutkimuksen toteuttamishetkellä opiskelleet vähintään yhden lukukauden Team Novialla.

Tutkimuksen tulokset ovat mielenkiintoisia ja antavat lähtökohdat tulevaisuuden kehittämistyölle. Yhteenvetona voidaan todeta, että Team Noviaan saapuvat vaihto-opiskelijat ovat tyytyväisiä kokemuksiinsa, mutta parantamisen varaa löytyy vielä.

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Kieli: englanti

Avainsanat: tiimioppiminen, Team Novia, opiskelijavaihto, vaihto-opiskelijat, kansainvälisyys korkeakoulutuksessa, palvelunäkökulma korkeakoulutuksessa

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## **1 Introduction**

My idea for the Bachelor's Thesis started to develop during autumn 2013. At that time I had recently come back from a student exchange and all my experiences and memories were in fresh memory. I decided to write my thesis about a topic that is related to internationalization in some way. A more detailed idea and the final subject for this thesis came up during last winter when my team had a course called "Introduction to intercultural leadership" together with exchange students. I found it to be very interesting and useful for every student that we had exchange students participating in the course. With them we could discuss about intercultural leadership in practice and hear their point of views.

At the same time as we discussed about different ways of lead people and cultural differences in management, I started to wonder what kind of feelings Team Learning and Team Novia as a learning unit arises among exchange students. The organization and culture we have here is something quite different though and may vary a lot from the one exchange students are used to in their home universities. I became curious to know more about exchange students' experiences and thoughts they have concerning Team Learning and Team Novia and decided to find out more.

My thesis is offering a comprehensive overview picture of Team Novia from an exchange student's point of view. An important part of this thesis was also to find out how Novia University of Applied Sciences and particularly Team Novia can develop Team Learning further.

In this research I have chosen to take into account only incoming exchange students' point of views because I was especially interested in hearing about incoming exchange students' opinions about Team Learning and their time in Team Novia. Also the fact that nobody has done comparable research about the same topic before encouraged me to continue with this research idea and stick with the target group.

I believe my research has produced useful information that my client, International Unit of Novia Turku, as well as Team Novia and the whole Novia University of Applied Sciences is able to utilize in the future. Collected information can be used both in developing work of Team Novia as well as in marketing activities that are aimed to reach students in partner universities of Novia UAS.

## **1.1 Problem discussion and the object of the thesis**

It is challenging in itself to move to another country and spend a semester or two in a completely different environment and culture. In the case of studies at Team Novia, Team Learning offers an extra challenge for exchange students. Team Learning as a learning method is something new and different also for Team Novia's own degree students when they start their studies. I believe there is no need to mention how confusing it may be for exchange students who in general come from countries where learning methods applied in universities are very different from Team Novia's methods and traditionally very much more theory based.

As I started this thesis process it was not clear what the actual situation with Team Novia and exchange students is. Due to the lack of previous researches made about the feelings and thoughts exchange students have, it was unclear whether Team Learning and the difference of Team Novia really was experienced to be that confusing as I assumed it to be. In order to find out the real thoughts and feelings exchange students have about Team Novia I decided to take a closer look into this topic.

The object of this Bachelor's Thesis is to build a detailed overview of how incoming exchange students experience Team Novia as a learning unit as well as to discover what kind of developing ideas they have concerning Team Novia.

The perspective in this thesis is marketing approach. It was chosen because of my field of specialization; marketing. It was natural to me to find linkages between expectations, choices, experiences and the experienced overall quality that could be utilized in marketing operations. Even internationalization has been taken into account due to its importance in today's working life as well as because of my personal interest towards the theme.

Due to the business oriented character of this thesis the pedagogical focus in this work is not especially strong. Pedagogy is not my area of expertise and this is why for example Team Learning has not been analyzed that closely in the pedagogical level despite the fact it is a learning method and contains lots of pedagogical point of interests.

On the basis of the object of the thesis I have formulated four research questions. In parentheses after every question I have referred to the area of Team Novia's operations where answers can be useful.



From an incoming exchange student's point of view,

1. What factors contributed to the fact that respondents chose Team Novia?

(Extern marketing activities targeted to partner universities)

2. Which aspects of the Team Learning method are perceived as positive and which negative?

(Everyday activities, customer satisfaction, extern marketing activities targeted to partner universities)

3. What kind of developing ideas does incoming exchange students have in order to improve Team Novia?

(Quality management, future operations)

4. Did the experienced quality of the exchange time met with the expected quality?

5. (Quality management, customer satisfaction, extern marketing activities targeted to partner universities)

## **1.2 Delimitations**

In the research I am only going to concentrate on incoming exchange students in Novia University of Applied Sciences who, at the time interviews were conducted, studied in Team Novia in Campus Turku. Because this research focuses mainly on Team Learning and the learning unit Team Novia, my target group is limited into incoming exchange students within Degree Programs in Business Administration, Tourism Management and Civic Activity and Youth Work. In other words respondents were chosen from the three Degree Programs that are using the Team Learning method and are thus part of Team Novia.

## **2 Internationalization in higher education**

Today's working life has become more and more international and the globalization is going to strengthen this development even more in the future. In order to survive in the global working life it is a remarkable advantage if students learn international competences and familiarize themselves with requirements of the international job market already during their studies. By this way students can get the best possible starting point for their future careers.

The capability of showing international competencies and to have international experiences can also function as a differencing factor in a job interview as well as strengthen career development in the future. According to a recent study made by European Commission, the risk of unemployment after graduation among alumni of Erasmus was shown to be 50 % lower compared to non-alumni students. Only two percent of students who attended to a student exchange (in terms of studies or work placement) were unemployed 12 months after their graduation while the number among non-mobile students was four percent. Also in longer term unemployment rate of mobile-students was shown to be lower compared to non-mobile students. After five years of graduation unemployment rate was 23 % lower among mobile-students. (European Commission 2014, p. 113, 116)

Quite recently universities have started to change their traditional ways of working and awoken to this growing trend of internationalization. Because of the demands of the global environment we are living in, the role of universities has also changed. This role has traditionally been to offer students theoretical knowledge that they are able to apply later on in working life. Due to globalization and new ways of working and thinking it is more and more the universities' responsibility to improve their international contacts and create networks with other universities in order to achieve their internationalization goals. Universities want to educate global citizens who have capabilities to work in an international environment. (Garam 2012, p. 5)

In order to manage internationalization goals universities have started to create systems that support student's participation in international activities. International mobility is an essential part of the internationalization work and most of the universities are really investing in it. Lately higher education institutions in Finland have also started to pay attention to internationalization work in the home field. It is at least as important as student-mobility abroad because still the majority of students are not participating into international

exchange programs. According to Nilsson (2003), Crowther et al. (2001) internationalization in the home field can be defined as an international activity that does not include mobility to abroad. Some researchers believe that internationalization in the home field should be included in every student's curriculum. Beelen (2011) has pointed out the importance of connections and interaction between local students and foreign students. In order to make home internationalization work and influence to local students' personal development and skills it must be done properly and invest in it in the long run. (Garam 2012, p. 5, 12) It is only natural that leading courses in English without any foreign students participating is not motivating students to practice their language skills. Neither does it make any sense of talking about the importance of learning multicultural communications and leadership in case there is not at least one group member participating who has a different cultural background.

The Ministry of Education has published an internationalization strategy for universities that covers time period 2009-2015. The purpose of the internationalization strategy is to create truly an international higher education community and to make sure the Finnish higher education gives students skills needed in an international working environment. The aim of strategy is even to promote Finnish education, improve its quality and make it more attractive in order to tempt talented and diligent students to study and work in Finland as well as export Finnish know-how abroad. (Ministry of Education 2009, p. 9-11, Garam 2012, p. 5)

Until today, 14.11.2014, the Ministry of Education has not yet published a new strategy for the next upcoming years. New visions and goals seem to be in progress though: quite recently, on 16.9.2014, vice-rectors of Finnish UAS had a workshop. This group of vice rectors is working under the Ministry of Education and are in charge of educational and pedagogical development of Finnish UAS.

The topic of the workshop was the current policy of universities but international perspectives were taken into account as well. At the moment Technopolis Group is preparing a report concerning the competitiveness and development needs of Finnish higher education institutes in relation to relevant reference countries. There reference countries used are Sweden, The Netherlands, Ireland and Switzerland. The goal of this report is to find out how Finnish education is managing with the internationalization and to see the points were things could be done differently. (Kosunen 2014, p. 6-7)

Previous researches (Green, Mertova 2009) have shown that the internationalization of education is in general an area where practice is more developed than theory. There are not yet established models that could be followed because of the big amount of different ways of defining the concept of internationalization and interpreting what it actually means. Often the internationalization of education is defined via its goals. (Garam 2012, p. 9) In Finland the larger frame of reference for internationalization goals in higher educational institutions is formed via the internationalization strategy for higher education that was presented above. The bigger frame of reference is likely going to change a bit after the new strategy will be published. Despite of possible changes every higher education institutes in Finland should consider its goals for internationalization work in a way they support the goals set up by the Ministry of Education.

Regardless of the organization, according to Leask (2001) the starting point for the internationalization strategy and later operations is to set clear goals for the internationalization process. In other words it is necessary to consider carefully the question: what do we want to achieve with the internationalization? In addition to clear goals it is important to create structural opportunities in to a curriculum and by that way support students to participate in international activities. The last issue to be considered is to create concrete processes for teaching and learning (for example international modules) which make it possible to achieve the goals of internationalization. (Garam 2012, p. 9)

According to Olson (2005), Clifford & Joseph (2005), to implement internationalization into institutions and establish it as a natural part of studies, both the management as well as personal working in study programs should be involved into planning process. The management has to commit to internationalization in terms of supporting it in institution's policy. Likewise the personal working with students must commit to internationalization work that is happening in practice in the field. Every study program must define concrete goals how internationalization is integrated into studies. This defining of concrete and measurable goals cannot be highlighted too much because it is important to be able to see whether the internationalization work is paying off. At the same time with goal defining it is also necessary to think about what kind of methods are used in order to measure the results so that they are objectively comparable. (Garam 2012, p. 10)

## 2.1 Novia University of Applied Sciences as an academic institute



*Figure 1: Logo of Novia University of Applied Sciences (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., e)*

Novia University of Applied Sciences (later referred as Novia UAS or in a short form Novia) is the biggest Swedish speaking University of Applied Sciences in Finland. It has more than 4000 students and about 360 staff members located around the west coast of Finland. Novia UAS offers higher education in many different fields of studies; almost everything from maritime management to nursing and from engineering to business administration. The main language of studies is Swedish but there are certain degree programs that are also taught fully in English. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., a)

Novia UAS profiles itself as a high-class regional university. Novia's strengths are linked around its strong presence and broad network it has in the entire Swedish-Finland. This is why regionalism and local developing work is very important part of Novia's activity. The slogan of Novia, freely translated to "Novia is where you are" describes organizational goals and vision about being an attractive university that has close contacts with the local working life and business developers. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., a, b)

Novia wants to be the leader within its strategic focus areas which are sustainable energy, natural resource management, ship simulation, art, health and welfare and older people's health and living conditions. A part of Novia's vision is to be internationally recognized. This international recognition is my main interest in this thesis work and below I will focus more on Novia's internationalization strategies and international activities. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., a, b, c)

## 2.2 International activities in Novia UAS

Novia UAS sees itself as an international University of Applied Sciences that has a large network abroad but also international activities in the home field. One of Novia's core goals in the internationalization work is to give students opportunities to participate in to international activities. Novia will encourage students to gather useful skills for the future's working life in a multicultural society. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., d)

There are lots of possibilities to add international aspects to studies in terms of student mobility. As a student in Novia it is possible to go for a student exchange or do an internship abroad. It is even possible to include both studies and internship abroad to the same degree if the student wish to maximize his/hers international experiences. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., d) A new way, which was taken into use in autumn 2013, is the Double Degree Program. It is a program between two universities that are committed to offering certain amount of courses in certain field for certain students participating in the program. The Double Degree Program participants, called as Double Degree Students, get eventually two academic degrees after they have performed an exchange year in host university abroad and successfully finished their degree in their home university. (Personal communications with my supervisor Helena Nordström on 6.11.2014)

As a special notice given to Novia's Double Degree Program must be mentioned that it is following the principles of the internationalization strategy that Ministry of Education has planned for universities. This strategy was presented earlier in this work in the page five. According to this internationalization strategy it is important to increase the education forms that "cross borders" and Double Degree Program was named to be a good example of these forms. However, in some contexts every activity related to internationalization in higher education that contains either student or staff mobility can be seen as "cross-border" education. Depending on the point of view even studying in a program organized by a foreign institute can be interpreted as "cross-border" education. (ARENE ry & UNIFI ry 2010, p. 3-4)

Despite the comprehensive opportunities to participate in student mobility not all students want or can go abroad during their studies even though they are interested in international activities in general. Because of this issue Novia also offers students the opportunity to get international experiences by participating in different international projects. Projects are organized in co-operation with foreign partner universities of Novia and depending on the

project it can be operated either abroad in a partner university or back home in Finland. This way participating in an international project does not necessarily require students to go abroad (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., d) which in my opinion can be a key factor in order to attract more students to take part in projects. Internationalization in the home field is working also via communication with incoming exchange students. Projects that are done together with them are also increasing international competences and skills without students needing to leave their home campus.

An alternative way for students to increase their intercultural competencies and be internationally active during their study time is to become an international tutor. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia 2014, p. 43) It has lately remained a bit in the background but can be very beneficial for students at the same time as it creates value for both the students themselves as of course for incoming exchange students who need their help. An international tutor takes care of incoming exchange students and makes sure they get a proper introduction to the study life and society. Tutor activities are coordinated by the student union Novium. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia 2014, a, p. 43)

Not only students but also staff members of Novia have many opportunities to be internationally active. In my opinion this is one of the key factors in order to implement "the international state of mind" to the whole organization. Depending on individual interest the possibilities offered for staff members are for example an exchange period in one of Novia's foreign partner universities, shorter intensive courses abroad in a partner university or participating in international projects abroad and/or at the home university. Very interesting opportunities open up also via the possibility to work some time abroad in a foreign organization or a foreign company. These organizations do not have to be other universities but different kinds of institutes where academic staff can develop their skills. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., d)

By offering different ways to be active within internationalization, Novia wants to support its staff to collect new experiences and create contacts with colleagues that are working in the same field. The idea is to help staff members to keep up their know-how as well as network and on the side increase their professional competencies. Through all the internationalization opportunities offered to students as well as staff members Novia wants to achieve its central goal within the internationalization work. This goal is to integrate international activities naturally into a part of studies and learning at Novia. (Yrkeshögskolan Novia n.d., d)

### 3 Service approach in higher education

In order to get back to the more business related theory I would like to introduce the service approach in higher education. This introduction opens up the reasons and the linkages between different topics that are discussed in the empirical part of this thesis and later in the analysis.

In the same way as the internationalization of higher education, also the marketing of higher education is globally a relatively new phenomenon and there are not established models made that could be directly followed. Because of this lack of "ready planned" theoretical models, the marketing of higher education can be observed by combining service marketing and marketing purposes for nonprofit organizations. In this thesis I will view higher education as a service. Before going deeper into the definition and the concept of a service let us take a closer look into the definition of education.

#### 3.1 Definition of education

After discussed about the definition of education it is easier to see how education can be seen as a service that customers (students) consume in order to develop their knowledge and skills in a certain field of studies. Katya Peeva from Trakia University, Bulgaria has presented quite a good range of definitions for education:

*"Education is a conscious activity of people seeking improvement in a specific area. It covers teaching and learning of scientific knowledge and specific skills, as well as a transmission of cultural traditions between generations."*

*"Education is the foundation of economic progress and is therefore an organized activity of society."*

*"Market economy forces individuals to become self-improved and educated, and to acquire a certain level of education." (Peeva 2009, p. 430)*

Based on these definitions it can be said that people are interested about educating themselves in order to increase their skills and broaden their general level of overall understanding of culture and social behavior. Also the role of market economy is remarkable: people are in general aware of the skills and demands that market has set and



are therefore willing to educate themselves in order to strengthen their own position in the society.

When observed at the societal level, the importance of education is undeniable. (Asplund & Maliranta 2006, p. 9) Education is even defined to be one of the most important investments that a country can make in order to improve the welfare of its people. Education is proved to fight against inequality and poverty. (Global Partnership for Education, n.d.) Because of the positive influence of education it is publicly financed and organized in many countries. In Finland educational institutes are operating under the Ministry of Education.

### **3.2 Education as a service**

To start with the definition of service, there are plenty of different suggestions depending of the point of view chosen. I chose to introduce Grönroos' definition because his service theory is emphasizing the importance of interaction in order to understand the needs of customers. Grönroos' definition for service is the following:

*"Service is a process that consists of a set of activities which take place in interactions between a customer and people, goods and other physical resources, systems and/or infrastructures representing the service provider and possibly involving other customers, which aims at assisting the customer's everyday practices"* (Grönroos 2008, p. 300)

There are three general features that can be linked to all services. The first and most important feature of service is its character as a process. Service is nothing concrete that could be bought from a store and be taken to home and consumed later in the future. Like said in the definition, service is a process that consist of activities or a set of activities. The second feature of service is related to the production process. Service is produced and consumed at least partly in the same time. The third feature of services is the presence of a customer in the production process. Customers are integrated into the production of services in order to find solutions to customers' problems. (Grönroos 2009, p. 77-80)

How education can be look as a service is based on the character of service and the character of education. Just like a service also education is a process. It is produced together in interaction with customers (students) and service provider (university, school, other institute and its personal. Education is an intangible asset and a customer may have

difficulties in order to see what benefits it can in practice bring to his/hers life. What educational institutes should do in order to solve this problem is to offer students clear communications about the contents of their educational services. Based on the principles of marketing, customer should be promised only what can be kept. (Grönroos 2009, p. 106)

One way how educational institutes could market their services is the experience approach. The experience received via a certain education has to be designed in a way that consumer's needs are met effectively. In the case of education it could be also seen as a never-ending process if thinking about the idea of lifelong learning: the learning does not stop at the moment a degree is done and certificate in hand.

### 3.3 Service quality management in higher education

Like discussed above, students are consuming education as a service and as an experience. In order to manage the customer satisfaction it is significant to know how the overall quality of education is experienced.

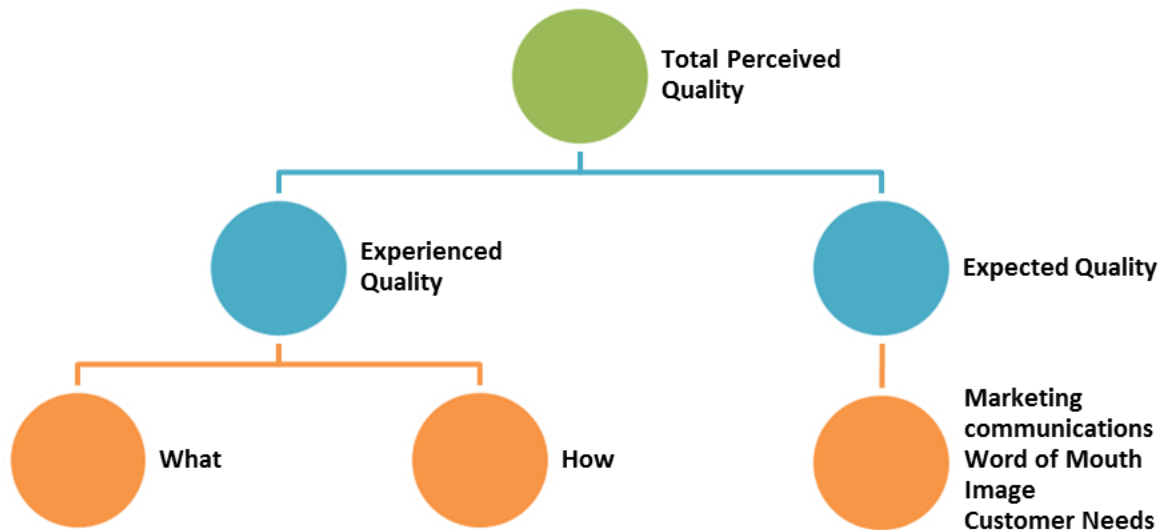


Figure 2: Grönroos' Model for Service Quality (Grönroos 2009, p. 105)

To continue with Grönroos' theories about service management, let us take a look into his model for service quality. In Grönroos' model the total perceived quality of a service is

consisting of two different parts: it is a mix between the expected quality that is based by image (that is based on not-controllable marketing communications), marketing activities (controllable marketing communications) and other things a client may have faced before actual service and which may have affected to his/hers opinions. On the other side there are the actual experienced quality (that is to say service as the way client experienced it.) This experienced quality consists of two aspects: what a client received (technical quality) and how this experience was produced (functional quality). (Grönroos 2009, p. 105)

It can also happen that the overall quality is experienced to be low even though it would be good by using an objective observant. Unrealistic expectations that do not realize are the reason for this. (Grönroos 2009, p. 105)

So the service quality management is closely related to all operations in the company. It is not only the marketing operations that helps customer to form expectations but also word of mouth marketing, the image of the service and customer's views of their needs. Actual experiences are formed around the questions what and how. Both of these aspects are closely linked into each other and the role of interaction is highlighted: everything can be done technically perfect but the customer can have a feeling of a poor interaction in the service process. On the other the situation can be the opposite as well: a functional and satisfactory interaction may forgive a lot to the technical side of a service. (Grönroos 2009, p. 105)

## 4 Team Learning

The purpose of this chapter is to open the concept of Team Learning, describe how it has developed and is nowadays adapted to serve as a learning method in higher education as well as to discuss the benefits of Team Learning in the view of the demands of working life. In this chapter I will also introduce the learning unit Team Novia, a department of Novia UAS, where Team Learning as a pedagogical method is used in practice. Team Novia is on the focus in the empirical part of this thesis work and this chapter gives the basic information needed in order to be able to follow the empirical part smoothly.

### 4.1 Principles of Team Learning

In order to understand the idea of Team Learning and the way it works it is best to start with the definition of a team.

*"A high-performance team generally consists of a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common goal and working approach. When successfully integrated, its member also cares for one another's personal growth and success...In all of this they must be properly led and managed."* (Lewis 2012, p. 2)

In a real life teams are often not working exactly in a way described above. In contrast, there are team members with various skills and different personal goals that may be opposed to each other, not to even mention the common goal of the team. In this case the performance level of the team is only a fraction of volume it could be. The biggest challenge in team work is to find a way to utilize the overall potential of a team. In order to find this potential and achieve results teams need to be coordinated and managed. (Senge 2006, p. 5)

In order to maximize the performance level of a team and make teams function in practice, Katzenbach and Smith have presented an idea of four elements which all are connected to each other. These elements are common commitment and purpose, performance goals, complementary skills and mutual accountability. A team cannot succeed without these elements but it can learn to build them and make results. (Katzenbach & Smith 2005)

*"The team that became great didn't start off great — it learned how to produce extraordinary results."* (Senge 2006, p. 4)

The quote above by Peter Senge sums up pretty clearly the whole core idea of Team Learning. In a learning organization, that a team is as well, people learn from each other and together they learn to work as "a dream team" (that is defined above by Lewis). In this kind of dream team the team is actually learning and Team Learning is happening. In true Team Learning teams are not only producing extraordinary results but their individual members develop more rapidly than they would have done otherwise. The key issue to keep in mind is that teams learn only through individuals who learn but learning individuals do not automatically mean learning teams. (Senge 2006, p. 9, 129)

The most important tool used in order to make Team Learning possible is dialogue. In dialogue team members are expressing their thoughts freely. The purpose is to discover together insights that would not be attainable individually. Dialogue differs from the more common discussion by abandoning an idea of needing to defend your own point of view. This defense is common for discussion but in dialogue instead, the point is to look for new ideas. (Senge 2006, p. 10)

The discipline of dialogue also contains learning how to identify that kind of patterns of interaction in teams that may undermine the learning process. Particularly patterns of defensiveness are often deeply rooted to a way teams works. In case these patterns of defensiveness are not identified they may undermine learning and prevent teams from developing. On the other hand, when recognized and handled creatively, same patterns that once hindered a team from learning can turn out to speed up the learning process. A productive dialogue is the core secret of Team Learning but it takes time to learn how to engage in it. Team Learning is vital for modern organizations because instead of individuals, teams are fundamental learning units. Organizations cannot learn and develop if the teams in them do not. (Senge 2006, p. 10)

## **4.2 Team Learning in Finland**

In general, the traditional Finnish education system doesn't leave space for independent learning and self-guidance, which are both important skills needed in today's working life. Usually all the study performances and their evaluation is defined beforehand and because of that students do not have possibilities to influence in their course work (in terms of what is done) or the working ways applied in practice (how the work is done). Students learn to do what they are told to and they learn to learn the theoretical knowledge they are

supposed to learn. What should be learned instead is the ability to learn and acquire new knowledge. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 12-15)

In the future it is more and more important to be able to show the ability to learn and apply the things learned in practice. Also the importance of strong, professional network and international competencies is becoming even more important in working life. In order to get and practice these skills Team Learning is offering a solution. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 14) Many Finnish educational institutes has already adapted Team Learning method and offer students an opportunity to build and organize their studies in a new, untraditional way and learn via a completely different learning method than they are used to.

#### 4.2.1 Theoretical basis

Team Learning as a learning method for higher education in the form it is nowadays known in Finland was originally developed in the University of Applied Sciences Jyväskylä in 1993. Back in those days, Professor Timo Partanen started to test a new learning system with his Business Administration students. His goal was to create a completely different method of learning that could be applied in practice. This new learning experiment, that later on developed to be a learning method, is based on Kolb's experiential learning theory. (Tiimiakatemia 2013, a)

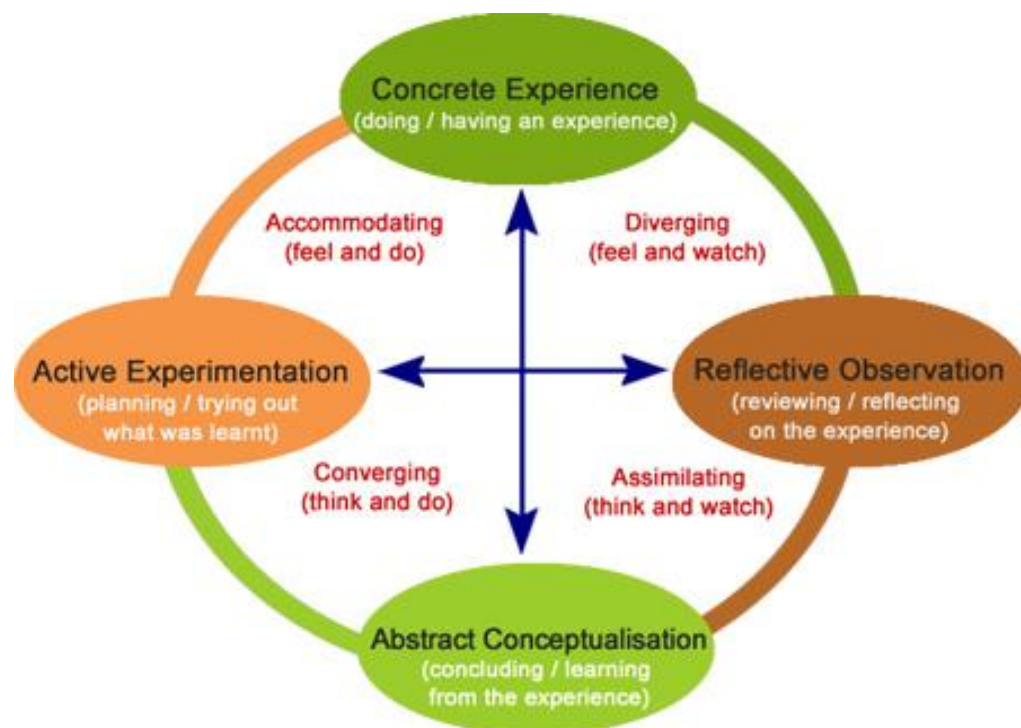
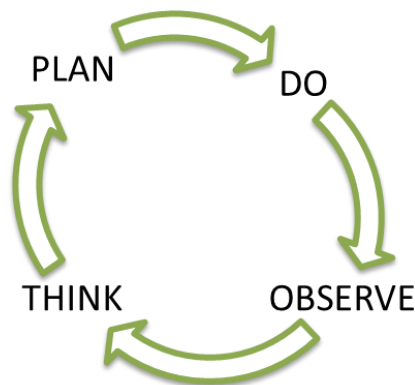


Figure 3: Kolb's learning cycle (Talentsprint n.d.)

Kolb's experiential learning theory is a holistic learning theory that is built around a four-stage cyclical model for learning that combines concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The model can be explained as the following: by experiencing things in practice and reflecting the experience it is possible to perform an abstract conceptualization about the experience. This conceptualization, a theoretical model or concept can be then used as a guide when planning new active experimentations and it can effect on the choice of these new experiences. The simplified model of Kolb's learning cycle would look like this:



*Figure 4: Simplified model of Kolb's learning cycle (Talentsprint n.d.)*

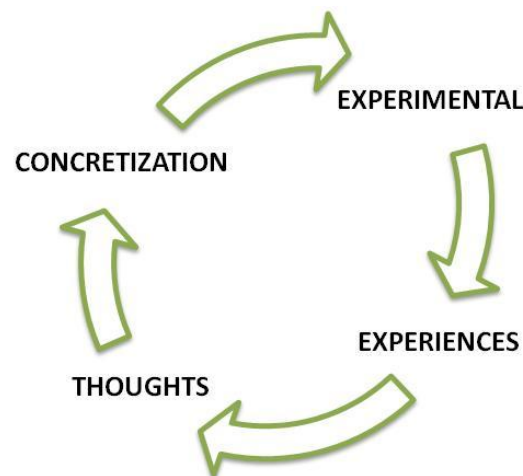
The learning happens via the process of doing, observing, thinking and planning. Kolb was having an idea of four different learning styles that would each correspond to the stages in the learning cycle. These four learning styles are the following:

1. Assimilators, who learn by considering logical theories
2. Converges, who learn by using practical applications made from the based on theory
3. Accommodators, who learn by “hands on” experiences
4. Diverges, who learn by observing and collecting information in a broad scale  
(Learning-Theories.com, n.d.)

Every person has a preferred way of choosing among these four learning styles. It is influenced by the hereditary equipment, life experiences and the demands of the present environment the person is living in. Learning styles used in practice are influenced by personality type, education, career choice as well as by current job position and tasks

performed at work. Even cultural influences between different learning styles have been identified by Yamazaki. (Kolb & Kolb 2005, p. 194-196)

So, back in Team Academy in the beginning of 1990's, Partanen was modifying Kolb's model of four-stage experiential learning cycle in order to make it work for students' needs. Instead of listening in lectures Partanen wanted students to go out from a class room and start learning by doing things (real projects) in a co-operation with real companies. (Tiimiakatemia 2013, a) As a result Team Academy's own cycle model of experiential learning was developed. Team Academy's learning cycle consists of the following elements: experimental, experiences, thoughts, and concretization. It enables the use of project based learning as well as the idea of learning by doing. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 23)



*Figure 5: Team Academy's Learning Cycle (Leinonen et. al. 2002, p. 23)*

Partanen's core idea with this new learning model was to make his students experience and test their ideas in practice. Based on the practical experimental and experiences gained students are able to reflect and form conclusions about the things they tested and experienced in practice. With the help of own experiences as well as theoretical knowledge that students adapt by reading relevant literature students are able to concretize their learning and come up with theoretical models and plans. These models and plans students can then use as a learning tool and help in the next projects. By following these plans students can apply theoretical knowledge (that is already once applied in order to form a practical application or "to do" plan based on the theory) in the project work and develop the knowledge further. By experimenting the models and plans created students learn what actually works in practice and what does not. Whenever something does not go exactly as planned or according to theory students reflect the reasons for this and come up with new,



fresh solutions in order to modify the theoretical models applied or try with new different models. The idea of testing, trying and learning by doing is encouraging students to think creative. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 22-32)

#### **4.2.2 Practical basis**

An important learning tool is the team itself and the team company that students establish in the beginning of their studies. In the team company (a co-operative or an association) team members work together, share thoughts and opinions and most of all learn together. The same team that starts together stays together till the end of studies. (Tiimiakatemia 2013, b)

Projects are the main method of Team Learning in the practical level. In project work students learn by doing concrete projects for real companies and real clients. Students can freely experiment their ideas in practice and apply the theoretical knowledge in practice with real problems instead of hypothetical examples. By that way students are able to learn via actual problems and actual situations they are likely to face later on in working life. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 16, 29, 87) After projects are done and presented students reflect their own work and give feedback to other project groups. This reflection helps in the learning process and based on previous projects (experiences) students have more knowledge for the next ones.

Training sessions (together with projects) are replacing regular classes in Team Learning. They will be discussed closer under chapter 4.3.2.

Despite of the practical orientated character of studies, theory is not forgotten either. What is significantly different compared to other institutes is the organizing of literature studies. Instead of a certain course book or books (that are same for every student) in Team Learning students can decide themselves which book they would like to read according to their own interests. The theoretical knowledge gained by the book can be applied directly in to practice and developed further on.

Instead of teachers or lecturers every team has a team coach. The role of a team coach differs from the traditional role of a teacher even though the general tasks are pretty much similar: a team coach guides the learning process, shares knowledge and follows how the learning is progressing. What distinguishes a team coach from a traditional teacher is the mode of operations: the responsibility is transferred from a coach to students. (Leinonen et al. 2002, p. 160) A team coach has an important role and he/she is there for the team. In

practice a team coach mainly observes, supervises and helps the team (but only if the team is asking for help). A team coach is not telling the team what to do or what should be done because the team must figure that out themselves and take their own responsibility of their decisions they make. (Tiimiakatemia 2013, b)

### **4.3 Team Novia**

Team Novia is an innovative learning unit of Novia UAS located in Turku Campus. Team Novia is a joint experiment of three Degree Program: Business Administration, Tourism Management and Civic Activity and Youth Work. In these Degree Programs students are not following traditional curriculums or learning methods. As a part of Team Academy's network, Team Novia is promoting and applying the project-based learning method used in Team Academy: Team Learning. (Team Novia 2014, a, Tiimiakatemia 2013 b)

#### **4.3.1 Mission, vision & focus areas**

Team Novia's mission is to be a dynamic regional actor by utilizing its pedagogical approach and learning methods. The vision of Team Novia is to be a significant forerunner in Team Learning in the Nordic region as well as to be the best in Finland in multi professionalism. Areas of focus are defined to be the following: sustainable region- and business development, professional entrepreneurship and internationalization. (Team Novia 2014, b, Team Novia 2013) What makes Team Novia unique in Finland is the incorporation of three Degree Programs. So far Team Learning has been mainly applied among business students only but in Team Novia the encouragement towards entrepreneurship is targeted for all students.

#### **4.3.2 Methods in a nutshell**

Team Novia is following Team Academy's footsteps when applying the learning method in practice. In the same way as in Team Academy, instead of regular classes students are forming teams in the beginning of their studies. In teams students learn most of all communication skills and the main aim is to develop the teams further and learn together. Teams stick together during the whole study time and they establish their own companies (co-operatives or associations) already during their first year of study. By working in these team companies throughout their studies, students learn to work as a part of a real company and they have possibilities to train and develop their professional skills in practice. (Team Novia 2014, a, b, c)

Learning tools used in Team Novia are adapted from Team Academy's model: instead of lectures and traditional theory based teaching student teams are having literature studies and study circles, training sessions and workshops, all occasions supervised by a team coach.



*Figure 6: The four core processes of the learning process in Team Novia*

To start with training sessions, they are regular occasions where a team as well a team coach is gathering together and discussing about actual issues the team is facing. The aim with training sessions is to form a productive dialogue where ideas can flow free and team members can make progression with issues they are working on at the moment. Every training session has one (or sometimes two) team member who is in charge of the training: he/she leads the dialogue forward whenever needed and makes sure that the training session is following its agenda. Based on my experiences training sessions were often divided into parts according to the agenda (that changes every time and is planned by the team member in charge of the training session). Typical points in the agenda can be for example check in, actual issues, projects (how they are processing forward, what will be done next, in case there are any problems that should be solved etc.) and check out. The content of the agenda depends fully on the team and the way they are willing to organize their work.

To move on to workshops, already the word workshop refers to the functional character of this occasion: students are having workshops in order to do things. Based on my experiences workshops are regular learning situations that are closely connected to certain courses. In training sessions it was often discussed what happened at the last week's workshop (what we did), what we learned (reflection) and how we should prepare for the next workshop (planning). Depending a lot on the course or the project, workshops can mean an alternative for traditional lectures (instead of listening lecturers students and team coaches are discussing about the topic and theoretical framework, planning starting points for the project, doing practical exercises, reflecting their own experiences related to the topic etc.) but they can also be situations that I would call as "supervised occasions for project work". In other words occasions when project groups can meet at the school at certain time and work with their project in the workshop where they may have other students working with them as well as have the coach in place from whom they can ask advice and help if needed.

Study circles are connected to literature studies. A form of study circle is for example a book circle that we used to organize every now and then in training sessions. The idea of the book circle was that everyone who had read the same book (or sometimes alternatively a book about the same topic) presented his/hers own thoughts, opinions and things learned from that book. By comparing and sharing experiences it was interesting to notice that different people paid attention to very different things though all of them read the same book. By discussing about different books in the group it was possible to broaden the theory base (theoretical understanding achieved by reading) outside of the one book you self read and see other point of views.

The learning contract is a personal study plan that every student in Team Novia does in the beginning of every semester. In principle learning contract can be an oral agreement but is usually a written paper that contains the personal goals that a student has for the upcoming semester as well as the plan how these goals will be achieved. Learning contract is discussed through in individual development discussion that is likewise organized every semester. It is a discussion between a student and a team coach where both partners can express their thoughts and opinions concerning student's learning process, goals and development.

All these practical learning tools are planned in a way they support students' personal development and learning. The practical point of view is taken into account in every

operation: a lot of learning is happening via actual projects that students are doing in co-operation with local companies and organizations. By participating in projects students as well as team coaches can gain valuable experience and know-how. Training sessions, workshops, literature studies and study circles are supporting the project work and helping teams to develop. (Team Novia 2014, a, b, c)

In Team Novia students have an opportunity to build a personal professional profile by designing their studies so that they correspond with personal interest that students have. (Team Novia a) This is made possible by giving students the freedom to mix and match different courses within the course plan and even create their own courses and modules in order to strengthen their professional profile. Instead of regular courses most of optional studies and specialization studies consist of profiles and modules that students are building up according to their own interest. That way every student can have different study patch even though the field of specialization is same. By giving freedom to choose and decide themselves, students are encouraged to be self-imposed, to think outside of the box and to come up with fresh ideas as well as to follow their interests and to find new alternative solutions.

#### **4.4 Benefits of Team Learning in working life**

Team Learning as a learning method introduces students one of the key quality needed for today's working life: the ability to learn and adapt new skills. Consultant and writer Claudio Fernández Aráoz from consultant company Egon Zehnder describes this ability to learn and adapt new skills as "potential." In these days a suitable education, intelligence and an impressive career may not be enough in a recruiting process. Companies have to find exactly the right persons to work for them and in order to find these people a professional recruiter has to identify this potential among several formally qualified job applicants. (Talouselämä 2014, p. 56-57)

Also previous researches are in line with Fernández Aráoz. The ability to perform lifelong learning was seen to be one of the most important skills in the future. It was also proved that in the future the importance of generic skills like communications skills, problem solving skills and information retrieval skills will be highlighted even stronger. One of the core skills is also the flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing situations in working life. (CIMO 2011)

Especially the skill of flexibility and the ability to respond to change in dynamic situations are definitely improved in project work where situations can change quickly. In Team Learning students are increasing these important skills and learning how to solve obstacles in the way in order to finish projects successfully.

The core competencies and skills needed in working life are presumably the same no matter which country we are looking at. Cultural differences between organization structure and general ways of working are very different though depending on the country and/or a bigger cultural area. What Team Learning as a learning method and an exchange time in Team Novia can offer for incoming exchange students (besides of the skills discussed above) is on top of the all the understanding of Finnish culture and Finnish working life. During the exchange time in Team Novia exchange students can participate in several projects and get a view to the Finnish organization culture and general ways of working. They will get introduced to the low hierarchy level and straight to the point thinking. They will learn how to co-operate with Finnish people. These skills can be very useful not only in Finland but in general in the whole Scandinavia; though Finnish business culture differs from our neighbors, it is quite close the Northern thinking and this is helpful for exchange students who are coming from other cultures outside of Scandinavia. (Lewis 2012, p. 131-134)

## 5 Implementation of the research

The empirical part of my research consists of theme interviews that took place between 24.4.2014 and 6.5.2014. Interviews were conducted both individually and in groups. The division between individual and group interviews were even: five interviewees participated in group interviews (there were two separate interviews, one with two Spanish students and another with three German students) and five interviewees were interviewed individually.

The interviewees, later referred to as respondents, consisted of a group of incoming exchange students who were studying in Team Novia during the spring semester of 2014. All together ten respondents out of a possible fourteen respondents (fourteen was the total amount of incoming exchange students studying in Team Novia in the spring semester of 2014) took part in my research.

Four respondents were Double Degree Students from Germany and five respondents were Erasmus students from France and Spain. One respondent was Croatian and studying in Team Novia via another kind of exchange arrangement because his university is not participating in the Erasmus exchange program.

In order to make conclusions based on interviews it is good to take into account that Double Degree Students had been studying the whole academic year in Team Novia by the time interviews were conducted while regular exchange students had spent only one semester in Team Novia by the interview date. This matter as well as the difference between Erasmus students and Double Degree Students has presumably influenced to answers given.

In the case of Double Degree Students, requirements concerning studies are in general stricter than they are with Erasmus students or other exchange students. Like one respondent told me, *“We actually get a degree from here so we have to get credits, grades and be really part of this system here.”* The reason for stricter requirements is based on the final result achieved in the end of an exchange year in Double Degree program: an actual Double Degree received from the host institution abroad. Due to this degree Double Degree Students should be treated like every other students in their exchange institutions and offer them possibilities to perform courses with same conditions as local students. (Personal communication with Double Degree students on 24.4.2014 and 6.5.2014)

## 5.1 Description of research method

As a research method in my empirical part of this Bachelor's Thesis I have used a qualitative research method. The reason why I preferred the qualitative method to quantitative is a character of the research and my will to keep it human-centric. Qualitative research method has the main focus on observations that the researched person has made about the researched topic. The method also gives room to the researcher to take into account different backgrounds of the researched persons and by that way form a deeper picture of a researched situation. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p. 27)

That is exactly what I wanted to achieve with my research: to get a deeper level of understanding about my topic. Instead of one narrow and highly limited area I was more interested in bigger lines and the team learning system as an entity. An important factor in my choice of a research method was also the idea about an open and free discussion. I rather aimed for that instead of a detailed questionnaire that does not really let space to additional comments and may therefore only offer a superficial picture of a researched phenomenon. As a matter of fact, I believe a quantitative method would not have even worked in my research because of the small amount of potential respondents. It is not possible to make generalizations concerning a large target group when the target group actually is small as it was in my case. (Tilastokeskus n.d.)

More important than the choice of an exact research method was the purpose of the research. My goal was to find out respondents' personal opinions and thoughts about Team Learning. I concluded that a theme interview with certain themes and some supporting questions is the most effective method for this purpose: it is not too formal or narrow but still planned in a way that more or less same areas of the researched topic are covered with every respondent. In practice this is possible because of theme interview, unlike a traditional structured interview, does not progress via specific, detailed and pre-formulated questions but more via certain pre-designed themes. These themes are prepared beforehand based on research questions and previous researches. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p. 47-48)

The idea of a theme interview is to plan carefully what kind of themes gives the most relevant information about the researched topic. This also creates demands towards the researcher who has to have a strong understanding about researched topic in order to be able to ask meaningful things and lead discussion into the right direction. Despite the fact that the interview themes are same for every respondent, researcher is allowed to change



the order and extent of themes. They may vary depending on interviews. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p. 47-48)

To sum up this description of the research method it can be seen that a theme interview reminds a lot of a regular discussion situation because respondents are allowed to talk freely within the framework of given themes. The researcher has only short notes with him/her so that there is enough time to focus on discussion itself and actively listen to the opinions and statements of the respondents. Even though it is important to follow certain themes planned beforehand, a successful researcher also pays attention in order to take into account respondents' interpretations and meanings they give into the words they use. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p. 47-48)

## 5.2 Method of data analysis

Method of data analysis applied in this research while analyzing results is called content analysis. Patton (2002) defined content analysis as *“any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”*. It is based on interpretations: the ones given by respondents as well as the ones researcher has made based on interviews. In content analysis the researcher has a relatively large freedom to pick up the things he/she is seeing to be relevant and leave others, not so important things outside of the final analysis. According to Weber (1990) the best content-analytic studies use both qualitative and quantitative operations. Both interpretations and the frequency of similar answers given are taken into account. (Zhang & Wildemuth n.d. p. 1) Interpretation of data step by step seeks to organize answers and help researcher to notice commonalities and differences respondents have named. (Tilastokeskus n.d.)

## 5.3 Interview themes

The first thing I did while starting the empirical part of this thesis was to plan suitable themes for the interviews. Interview themes were designed in such a way that they support both the theoretical framework of the thesis as well as give as much useful research material as possible about the researched topic. The themes were accepted both by my client and my supervisor before interviews were performed. The final interview base

consisted of four main themes together with the opportunity to give additional comments. The interview themes were following:

- Motives and expectations for the exchange period
- Choice of university
- Team based learning system
- Expectations vs. experienced quality
- Free word

The main focus on interviews was given to the team based learning system (which is referred as Team Learning method in this thesis.) In the research it is the most important object of interest because there was not substantial former knowledge available about this theme. A reason for inadequate information was natural: the whole Team Learning method is a relatively new system and not that many exchange students have studied in Team Novia after Team Learning method was taken into use. Other themes were discussed as well because they supported the main theme and helped in order to build a bigger picture of Team Novia as a whole. Every one of these so called supporting themes is also important in itself.

Respondents' motives, expectations and reasons for their choice of university were discussed because these themes can offer a lot of information related to Team Novia's marketing activities and external communications. Especially motives and expectations are also very important when considering the quality management of Team Novia's service (ie higher education). Expectations and experiences are handled even separately by taking a closer look into the quality aspects and the overall customer satisfaction respondents had.

## 6 Results of interviews

The results of the interviews are presented by themes in the same order as they were discussed in the interview situations. That way the structure is kept logical to follow. The interview base and supporting questions around themes can be found as an appendix in the end of this thesis.

### 6.1 Motives and expectations for the exchange time

The first theme in the interview was to survey motives and expectations that incoming exchange students had for their exchange time. I was curious to find out why respondents decided to go abroad in the first place and what kind of expectations they had for their exchange time in advance.

The most often mentioned reason to go abroad was the will and interest of discovering new places and cultures. Half of respondents i.e. five persons named this to be a motivating factor to go abroad. During the talk about discovering new cultures four respondents told that they were especially interested in Scandinavian culture and way of life. This interest effected their decision to go abroad and to head towards Northern Europe.

Three respondents said that new experiences and the will to travel and explore something completely new and different was a motivating factor to the exchange time. Also the curiosity of seeing new ways of studying and getting new knowledge attracted four respondents to take a chance and become an exchange student. The possibility to go abroad as an exchange student was also mentioned to be an easy way to explore foreign country and a great chance. One of the respondents summed up the situation as follows:

*"Well, I could not wait to go abroad because I love to travel and I love to travel especially as a tourist but when I had an opportunity to actually study somewhere that was the opportunity I won't miss."*

To meet lots of new people was separately named as an expectation by four respondents. Although later during the interviews this expectation was mentioned by all of the respondents. A general interest towards new languages and new places was mentioned by two respondents. One respondent said that it was time for a change and another thought that exchange time is a good possibility to become more independent.

To improve language skills, particularly English skills was named by four respondents and two of them mentioned it to be the most motivating factor to go abroad. Going abroad was seen as a possibility to learn foreign languages in practice. The fact that it is necessary to deal with a foreign language and go out of your comfort zone was seen as a positive thing that forces you to learn faster.

Two respondents mentioned the Finnish education system to be one of reasons that motivated them to go abroad. They had heard lots of good things about the education so they decided to come and see how studying really is like in Finland.

## **6.2 Choice of University**

I was interested in knowing why exchange students decided to come particularly to Novia instead of some other university. I wanted to handle this theme separately because of the background information I got from my client. Apparently the situation in Novia has been previously more or less the following: exchange students have come to Novia as their second or even third option after their primary alternative for an exchange destination did not work out. Then during their exchange time in Novia they have not been too eager to study or give their contribution to the school work. This might be caused by the fact that Novia has been seen as an alternative university that is not too strict or challenging and kind of allowed a permission to ignore the study aspect of the exchange time. (Personal communications with Isabelle Bonnet on 23.4.2014)

However, results show that every single one of my interviewees came to Novia because they wanted to come there as their first option. Most of them, eight respondents, named that the choice of university was based on recommendations from other students or personal at their home universities. Four of respondents told that Novia's team learning system was an important reason when they decided where to go.

Three respondents said that their choice of university was based on the country. Basically Novia was chosen as it is located in Finland and the university in itself did not matter that much. The curiosity about Finland took over all other criteria and the university itself did not played that remarkable role in their decision. The partnership between universities instead was seen as a determining factor when choosing the country and the university. So the reason why respondents chose to spend their exchange time in Novia instead of some

other university in Finland was simple: Novia is part of the partnership network their home universities has.

In the same context about choosing the university I wanted to find out whether respondents knew in the first place what they were getting into. That is to say if they knew about team learning system before their exchange time or did it come as a surprise. I chose to ask this because I found it to be an extremely important question considering the adaptation for Novia as well as the preparation that incoming exchange students do before they come to Novia.

It turn out that all ten respondents knew about team learning system before their exchange time but some more than others. Four respondents said that they knew that the studying system in Team Novia is different but that was pretty much it; they were not aware of the fact how the system actually differs from a traditional way of studying and the way that they have at their home university. Two respondents instead were very well informed by their fellow students in their home universities and they knew what is the studying like in Team Novia. Rest of the respondents knew approximately how team learning works in Team Novia but the system was a bit different in praxis than they imagined beforehand.

## **6.3 Team Learning**

The main theme of the interviews was Team Learning; the team based learning system that is used in Team Novia. I was very curious about the emotions, thoughts and experiences that it evokes in the interviewees. The system being quite new and different compared to the "normal traditional way of studying" I figured out that this is the most important part of the whole research - the most important thing to know in order to make truthful conclusions.

### **6.3.1 General thoughts about Team Learning**

I started by asking interviewees whether they like the team based learning system or not. Three respondents said that of course they like the system and prefer it to the method they are using in their home universities. One respondent answered simply *"Yes, I like it."* and two respondents were having an opinion that yes, they do like the team based method a lot but some changes would be smart to make. The rest four respondents said that they do like the method in principle but they would like to make some changes to it in order to improve it better. With some improvements the whole Team Learning system could develop so that

respondents could be truly happy with it. These improvements will be discussed closer later on under the subtitle "Developing ideas for Team Novia".

I was curious to find out as well whether interviewees would like to have the same kind of learning method at their home universities. Answers given to this question varies a lot depending on where respondents come from. German respondents said that the best for them would absolutely be a mix between theory and practice: somewhat practical studies combined with the traditional theoretical way of studying. Spanish respondents were having different opinions: one said that the system would probably not work in Spain at all because of the culture and different mentality of Spanish students. Two other Spanish respondents were having the opinion that Team Learning system would be better than the current learning method in Spain. French respondents were having similar thoughts than Spanish: the first French respondent was wondering that a Team Learning method could work in France but maybe with some modifications. He would like to have same kind of method back home, but was not sure whether it would actually work in France. The second French respondent said directly that no, she thinks that the system would not work in France in any way because French people do not accept change easily and are not willing to co-operate with each other. This was said to be based on the culture and upbringing. My last respondent is Croatian and he told that they are already trying to apply the same kind of learning system in his home university in Croatia. The problem is simply that in practice teams do not function and students will not co-operate with each other. He mentioned that it is most likely a cultural difference between Finns and Croatians; Croatians are more individualistic people than Finns.

### **6.3.2 Pros**

Most frequently cited positive thing about the Team Learning system was seen to be the co-operation between students. Seven out of ten respondents said that it is a great thing that you learn to work with different people. Six of them also mentioned that it is an extremely useful skill when thinking about the future working life where you need to be able to work with different colleagues. This learning of capability to co-operate and team work with every team member was mentioned to be one of the biggest strengths that Team Novia has compared to other universities.

*"Everyone has different strengths and knowledge and you can share everything with team".*

*"What I have learned here in Novia is that the success of team work really depends on the team you are in. You just have to accept your team and make the best out of it, no matter with whom you are working with."*

Another positive thing that came up was the practical point of view and the big amount of project work. Both pros were mentioned by three respondents. In Team Novia the whole concept of studying is practical and respondents really liked the idea about learning by doing things for real instead of reading theory books and writing book exams.

*"If you take the system seriously and are passionate about this whole concept you can get a lot from it. You can gain knowledge and profit from it. You really can apply theory into practice and get some new insights if you read your books."*

Respondents also appreciated the freedom that practical based studying gives to students. It was named that as a student in Team Novia it is possible to plan and manage your own time schedule and decide when you want to get school work done. On the other hand this same freedom forces students to be in charge of their own learning and take the responsibility of it to them.

The overall atmosphere at the campus was experienced to be relaxed and respondents really liked that. One respondent told that he liked particularly the fact that in Team Novia, unlike in his home university, there is no competition between students. He also had the feeling there is no stress or pressure which he experienced to be a very positive thing. However, this lack of stress and pressure was also mentioned by a few other respondents, who did not only see it as a positive thing. I will come back to this point of view later on when discussing about downsides of Team Learning system.

Team Novia was given respect for its close atmosphere and low hierarchy. It was mentioned separately as a positive factor by three respondents. Respondents found it very nice that they could always contact couches and professors in any case of problem. Likewise couches had time to help and catch up with students. Based on stories I heard from respondents this kind of behavior is not usual in their home universities and that is exactly why it was seen to be something extraordinary but absolutely positive.

Team work was named to be a positive thing in many ways. Respondents said that due to regular training sessions and close contacts with team mates students learn to communicate and work in groups. Own team was seen as a motivating factor: in case of motivation

problems your team can work as your motivation. This argument was explained by the responsibility and loyalty that every student should feel towards their team. Also the team spirit and that way the general atmosphere improves when everyone in team is involved and committed to common goals.

One respondent said that it was pleasant to notice how students in Team Novia were giving and receiving criticism in a positive spirit without wanting to let anyone down. Communication between team members and especially weekly training sessions with dialogues were seen to be useful also in order to improve presentation skills. Two respondents said that they had improved their oral skills a lot during their exchange time in Team Novia. It was mentioned to be definitely a thing that they would not have learned that effectively by staying at their home universities where presentation skills are not practiced that much because learning is more theory focused than in Team Novia.

*“One thing that I want to say is that what I really liked about in Novia is that there are only few exchange students. That is really a big advantage of Novia. Also it is good that we exchange students in Novia were always divided into different groups. It is something Novia really should keep in the way it is.”*

As an opposite of Team Novia and the small amount of exchange students, the respondent above mentioned Åbo Akademi where the amount of exchange students is much bigger. Respondent was very happy to have an opportunity to get to know every exchange student in Team Novia and at the same time be able to create contacts and make friends among local students. The team spirit and integration to Finnish-Swedish culture was seen to be effective and something completely different compared what her friends in larger universities have experienced.

### **6.3.3 Cons**

Definitely the biggest disadvantage with Team Learning was mentioned to be the lack of motivation and the reasons that may lead to it. It was mentioned by five respondents. Below I have collected some of the comments given by respondents when I asked them to mention downsides about team learning system.

*"When there is a team where two or three people work and the rest don't do anything."*

*"Most of the students don't take this seriously and that is why they don't learn anything from it."*



*"Here you can pass without doing anything."*

*"I have met so unmotivated students here."*

In practice this lack of motivation was told to show up for example in project work: the fact that not everyone in a team participates as actively as others was seen problematic in terms of team spirit and general motivation level of the whole team/project group. Because of lacking motivation and low contribution level that some project members have, some other members have to do a lot more work than planned beforehand. These active project members also have to spend their energy into pushing and encouraging others to do their job so that lazy project members would give even some kind of contribution into the project. This kind of division of work was experienced to be unfair towards these students who really have the interest to invest seriously in their studies and get good results from projects.

*"If you had a bad luck you will get into a team with really unmotivated people that are not contributed into it. They don't have the same motivation or interest and you have to motivate them all the time and push them and at the end do everything by yourself if you want to get something done."*

Respondents said that they were prepared to face some differences in motivation between students (like in every university) but the fact that some students were so unmotivated that it effected the others work and mood too - that was something respondents were surprised and even disappointed about.

Another problematic thing about team work was named to be conflicts of interests. It was said that they are difficult to avoid in a big team because there are always conflicts of interest between team members and the bigger team the more conflicts show up. Actually, according to respondents with whom I discussed deeply about this problem, the general lack of motivation was explained to be partly a result of these conflicts between interests. I will clarify this thought more with an example in the following.

As background information it is good to point out that in every degree programs in Team Novia there are a certain amount of obligatory courses and projects which means that every student has to get these obligatory courses done in order to graduate and to get their diploma. Let us take a course called sustainable development as an example, because it is a course that in general divides opinions among students.

So the situation is approximately the following: a team starts the course sustainable development. Part of the course consists of project work that is usually performed in small groups. Some students are very into the topic and share a passion towards the course topic. They think actively about sustainable solutions and come up with inspiring project idea that they are eager to try in practice. Meanwhile other students, the ones who do not share the passion to course topic, may not be interested about sustainable development at any level. However, in the same project group there are likely to be both kind of students as well as them who are not very eager to do anything but are not obtaining the project either. So, we have a very different mix of personalities in the same group. What most likely happens is the conflict situation where some students would like to give in everything to make a good work and the rest are not interested to do anything (or at least not more than they have to). Mirroring against this starting point it is no wonder that less-motivated students have difficulties to motivate themselves into good performance when a project itself does not wake any interest in them.

This was a one scenario that came up in interviews and it was seen as a likely reason for motivation problems. Most of respondents had faced this situation at least once during their time in Team Novia. Another reason for low motivation as well as a problem as itself was seen to be the freedom of team learning system. Above we discussed the positive sides that freedom was given to students but there were also some downsides that were mentioned, as for example the following things: lack of deadlines and schedules that would hold on, lack of pressure and push as well as lack of consequences whenever things are not done in time, not as told or not even at all.

The lack of proper consequences was mentioned by four respondents. The problem with that was the feeling of injustice: as a hard working student you do not really achieve anything extra and vice versa, as a lazy student you are neither punished in any way. Respondents felt like there should be somewhat consequences that would follow in case you are not taking care of your studies. I will come back to this under developing ideas for Team Novia. One of the respondents expresses this opinion according the following:

*"Maybe it (team learning system) is sometimes too much free. Maybe it should go step by step to give freedom to the teams. I have the feeling that everybody takes the easy way out because there is not that much push or pressure. I simply have that feeling that if nobody is a little bit pushing them on; it is like the easiest solution is the first one. I mean it is typical*

*for everyone and it is not bad but I have that feeling at least. I think there should be a little bit more stress to keep the motivation level up."*

It was also mentioned by three respondent that it seems like that grades do not matter to Finnish students that much or even at all. According to comments given it affects results and gives the impression that students just do not try their best because it is never truly required. The same problem of not trying your best was also being seen in project work. Respondents said that based on their experiences about projects the work was quite often left unfinished because of the lack of time, interest or both.

*"It is also annoying that the coaches appreciate our work input so much when we actually don't do that much. It is not extraordinary if you do your work in time and in the same way than home where we are the lazy ones."*

Four respondents were also wondering about the usefulness of training sessions. It was seen that they could give so much more than students actually got from them. Reasons for ineffective training sessions were for instance the lack of proper agendas and/or problems with following agendas and the feeling that way too much time was spent on general discussions or with things that has nothing to do with school. It was said to be relaxed and cool but not anything you actually learn something from.

*"Sometimes it is hard to see what the point of training sessions is if we don't get anything from them."*

The project hour system was given criticism too. There were some problems with it starting with the idea of project hours. Respondents told that it was difficult to understand why it is necessary to calculate hours and write them down. They wished that someone could have explained the system clearer in the beginning. Then later on, when it turned out that not that many students really work all the hours they officially write down, the hour system was felt like to be even more useless. Four respondents said that it is pretty pointless to calculate project hours if results really are the ones that should matter. One respondent commented on the problem that comes up in case there are not many projects going on. In that case it is challenging to get enough project hours in order to get enough credits.

#### 6.3.4 Interaction and grouping

Next I wanted to know how exchange students experience courses and projects in terms of organization of groups. As background information to this question it is good to mention that unlike regular students who automatically have their own team that they belong to, exchange students are divided into different teams at random. In practice this means that some exchange students were put in to a team that was studying same year course as they were in their home universities and even same degree program while some others had completely different year courses and degree programs. Likewise, some exchange students spent their whole semester or academic year with one team and some others changed their team every once in a while. Some exchange students even had two teams with whom they were having training sessions. There were quite a lot of variations but mostly everyone has been happy with the one they had.

The question asked was the following: Is it better to have courses with different groups or do you prefer to have one group and have most of courses with them? The majority of respondents had an opinion that one team is the best solution. Arguments for this were that one team makes it possible to connect closely with team mates and build a good team spirit. Another supported suggestion was the idea of having one main team and some additional courses with different teams.

*"We were a bit disappointed in the beginning that we could not be part of one team or work with one company or be part of one team company. It would be nice to have one main team and then have additional courses with different teams. Because we never stayed more than two months with a one team we didn't integrated with the teams that well."*

The citation above was said by a Double Degree Student. All four of them were having similar thoughts. They hoped that in the future incoming double degree students would have an opportunity to become a part of one team and really take part into team company's actions and development. The fact is they spend a whole academic year in Team Novia anyway and that is why it would be important to create a way how they can give their contribution into team work and integrate.

The next respondent was happy with two teams she had. Both teams were studying tourism just like the respondent does in her home university.

Two respondents had different experiences. In Spain they are studying HRM but here in Team Novia they were studying the whole semester with Civic Activity and Youth Work

students. According to respondents, spending a semester studying different things in a new degree program gave them new point of views for learning and doing things. It was also told to be refreshing to see how things can be done in a very practice-orientated way. Besides, part of courses they had during semester was totally compatible with the ones respondents would have had back at home. The rest of credits (that were not fulfilled by projects) were achieved by taking additional courses and projects in Business Administration.

According to one respondent it is a very good thing to mix teams and change them every now and then in order to meet lots of new people and learn from as many different personalities as possible. On the other hand, another respondent said that due to the constant change of team she felt like the integration was left to be too superficial. She thought that with a one team it could have been possible to form closer contacts with team mates and benefit more from training sessions.

One respondent was thinking that actually every team in Team Novia should have at least one incoming exchange student all the time. He told that it really made a big difference and forced Finnish students to come out of their comfort zones. In the end everybody in the team learned a lot and gained knowledge that is valuable for both Finnish- and exchange students.

This also led us to the next matter I was interested in to hear about: interaction between local students and exchange students. My goal was to know whether interviewees think there is enough interaction and incase not, what could be done in order to increase it. Answers given were somewhat diverse. The first respondent was happy with the current situation and answered that thanks to social networks and regular training sessions there has been enough interaction. The second respondent was also happy with interaction and answered the following:

*"Yes, in Spain I never went out with exchange students but here I have spent a lot of time with Finnish students, from my team, we do things together and they help me with everything. My teams have been really helpful and explained things so many times that everything is clear. They really wanted to help us. But some exchange students have had problems if the project group only speaks Swedish with each other and exchange students can't understand anything."*

Third respondent summed up pretty well thoughts that German respondents had:

*"It was really depending on team we were in. Some were more open and some don't. Some didn't feel comfortable when they had to speak English and we had a bit of feeling that we are the reason they can't work that well and we are making things difficult. Even though we had many teams we spent time with locals also in free time and we did trips and stuff. The school is so small that it is easy that have free time activities with team mates and everything is so relaxed."*

Forth respondent commented that he thinks that there could be more interaction but according to his experiences most of Finnish students like to keep their space and he does not want them to feel uncomfortable by starting actively conversations or trying to be "too social." One reason that he thought can affect a lot is the foreign language. It was mentioned by three respondents that local students become less social when they must communicate in English. It was seen as a hinder that some Finnish students are not willing to speak in English. One respondent told that *"Sometimes I felt sorry that I could not speak Swedish because many people were so uncomfortable with speaking English."*

One respondent thought that "a language barrier" is problematic only in the beginning and does not really work as a hinder after everyone become comfortable with using foreign language or at least learn to manage with English. After team members accept that nobody speaks perfectly and mistakes are acceptable they start to have a normal dialogue and continue to have training sessions in a normal way, just like they would in Swedish. He thought though that there should have been more interaction. His team tried to organize things together but it did not really worked out to make it as a regular activity.

### **6.3.5 Developing ideas for Team Novia**

In the end of this interview theme I wanted to know respondents own ideas and opinions about how team learning system could be improved. The most suggested improvement was handled already before when talking about motivation. Six respondents said that an important thing to change in the future is to add some pressure, push and consequences. It was believed to increase the motivation and cut off the chances of getting your credits eventually without doing anything for them. Respondents also believed that a suitable amount of requirements and demand of results would boost students to try harder and get more concrete things done in project work. On the other hand, as a result of a good work teams could be rewarded and given more freedom. A respondent reflected this matter as the following:

*"Well, except the thing I already said that there need to be a little bit more pressure, pushing and control, I was thinking...they could give more freedom when the team does something good. After that it could be possible that for ex. deadlines don't matter that much because you did this and this well and if they do it bad the deadlines should be solid and if they miss it there would be a bit more consequences. Not just like "write another book report" but a bit more so that people would be a little bit more stressed about it because in the end a bit of stress is not a bad thing."*

Another improvement that was largely supported was to increase contacts with companies.

*"More company visits. We had a great one with Wärtsilä. It was really inspiring and passionate speakers could really increase students' motivation here in Novia."*

In addition to organize more company visits respondents suggested making more projects together with companies and building networks that way. Respondents said that it would be awesome to see a situation where Team Novia is well known in Turku region and local companies would actively ask teams to participate in their projects and co-operate with them in a larger scale.

*"Maybe a good way to change the system a bit would be that a part of reading hour/individual work could be replaced with lectures/teaching. Not with boring lectures but with interactive lessons and with case studies etc. Practical teaching with examples from the real working life, case studies etc. Lectures are not necessarily boring and passive like couches think but they can also be inspiring."*

Three respondents wished that Team Novia would change the structure of course work according to the plan above. Five respondents felt like the individual learning part (that consists of reading a book and writing a book reflection about it) is not challenging enough as the way it is because demands of book reports are not particularly high. Individual learning usually covers one third of all course hours and this idea of interactive lectures/lessons could replace a part of that one third.

*"We have used our theory based skills in our projects but if you don't have the basics from theory how can you use it?"*

Another developing idea mentioned by respondents was that in addition to lectures Team Novia could take somewhat theoretical studies in to the learning program. In practice this would mean that for instance business students should be offered basic courses in

economical skills like marketing, accounting and financing. The theoretical knowledge could be taught in terms of interactive lectures and possible exams in order to test whether students really have gained the knowledge or not. The idea of this development suggestion is to ensure that students have the basic knowledge in theory that they are able to apply in projects later on.

As a comment to this suggestion it must be said that the theoretical basis of Team Learning is based on the theoretical studies too; students in Team Novia read books and get ideas from them. The challenge is to learn from the books read as well as from the projects done: what kind of theoretical model can be applied and use in the following projects and what kind of theory may support the work at the moment. Probably the theoretical side of Team Learning is just difficult to concretize in the beginning when everything seems to be about the practice only.

According to the feedback given by the respondents, the role of team coaches was in general seen to be too soft. Respondents wished that coaches would be stricter and require more from the teams. Some consequences would be needed in case it seems like the teams are not progressing. The situation when nothing happens and weeks are just passing by is the one that should be avoided. Respondents thought that the balance between strictness and softness should be more focused on strictness than it is at the moment. The open and relaxed atmosphere of Team Novia was given appreciation but in order to lead the teams through the degree successfully respondents hoped that coaches should dare to be in charge. This should be done even though the responsibility of success and learning is given to students. I think that in here the softness of coaches may be related to the fact that the idea or the role of a coach is probably difficult to understand in the beginning due to the fact that they are differing so much from traditional teachers who tell students what to do and when (team coaches do not).

Some other developing ideas relating to team coaching came up too. Respondents hoped that team coaches should show more involvement in to their job as a team coach and guide teams more. This guiding means in practice more answers instead of questions and more teaching and clues when teams are not progressing further on. Also the better organization of projects and courses was mentioned. Things to be fixed before starting a course or a project are to plan a schedule and stick to it, increase the challenging aspect as well as to plan a course or a project in a way that time spent is used effectively. According to Team Learning's principles lots of these things are actually up to students themselves.



Respondents wished though that coaches would also prepare their work more carefully, for example by making sure that the classes are held whenever said and in case there are some changes according to time schedules etc. coaches would inform everyone beforehand about these changes. A developing suggestion according to projects was also to cut off unnecessarily paper work or at least reconsider which all documents are truly needed. For example Pre-Motorola and Post-Motorola (reflection papers where team members reflect their success in a project work) were suggested to replace by using a well written project plan and a comprehensive course reflection. This change was said to be potentially helpful in order to motivate students to return documents in time/write them in the first place.

Three respondents mentioned that they would also have appreciated a lot to hear more about the previous working places and jobs that team coaches have had before they became to Team Novia and started as a team coach. Respondents were hoping for more concrete examples and stories about working life that would give a practical point of view to theoretical information and topics that are discussed in training sessions.

The last suggestion is related only to exchange students who had had quite various experiences about different teams. In the case of local students this issue is not relevant. Five respondents told that they would organize teams in such a way that a team consists of students who actually study the same degree or same kind of things. In practice this means that business students are having their own team, tourism students theirs and Youth Work students theirs. This developing idea was explained by common interests. It was said that most likely the discussion in training sessions will be deeper and more useful when topics discussed are more or less relevant to everyone in a team. Some respondents told about training sessions where they were thinking that oh right, people are very nice and the atmosphere is nice too but I am not interested about these things discussed at all. This is a feeling they hoped that this change could prevent.

In addition to ideas concerning Team Novia, respondents had some thoughts and development suggestions that would improve the overall quality of exchange time. The biggest problem at the moment and the thing that needs to be fixed was told to be a virtual course in Swedish. It was named by seven respondents as a thing that they were disappointed about. Before arriving to Finland and Team Novia respondents were hoping that they would learn Swedish and for some of them this was even a motivating factor to choose Team Novia. Instead of virtual course respondents said that a proper way of

organizing a language course for exchange students would be a regular language course with lectures, teaching and interactive exercises.

#### **6.4 Expectations and experienced quality of the exchange time**

The last actual theme in interview was about to find out how happy interviewees were with their exchange time in Novia University of Applied Sciences. The purpose was to know whether respondents feel like the exchange time as a whole (including everything from arriving to Finland to school work and free time) has met their expectations. Statistically results were divided even; half of respondents answered that exchange time fulfilled expectations and other half was having the opinion that yes and no, depending on which expectations are discussed about. Below there are some comments given by respondents.

*"I am very happy with my semester. I am more self-confident when I speak in oral. I was so shy to speak in a group before and now thanks to training sessions I'm more open. It has helped a lot to express myself. Here people are...You feel that people don't judge you. It was very appreciable. I don't regret that I chose this university."*

*"I never forget this. I really like the people, the system, the town, everything. Everybody in this school has helped us a lot from the beginning."*

*"For me this year was a really unique experience. I think we (all German girls) made very different experiences as other exchange students that went abroad (from our school)"*

Respondents were highlighting the feeling about Team Novia as a different and unique learning unit where you are able to be yourself. Also helpfulness of other students and personal was appreciated.

*"Yes and no. I was expecting more lessons and not only team work but Finland is Finland and Novia is, well Novia definitely met my expectations."*

*"I don't regret at all coming here even though I thought I would be an expert in some area after this year and learn a bit more. I have had a really good time here, we have travelled a lot. But the thing that they promise us, that we would learn fluent Swedish, well it was a disappointment because there was no Swedish course."*

*"Yes but I have given a lot of input to learning by myself. The school doesn't give input so I really had to be motivated. I have been working hard and been very active, read lots of books and learned in my free time. It is your own responsibility do you learn or not. I would have wished a bit more input from the schools' side."*

Some respondents were having expectations that were not completely met or Team Novia could not provide them everything promised. Double Degree Students were disappointed because they were not able to have "a main team" with whom to integrate. Despite positive aspects they saw in their constant change of teams they were still having a feeling that the promise of an own team (that would last the whole academic year) was not fulfilled. They did not get a possibility to be a part of one team and it was not possible to change regardless of their requests.

Another disappointment that influenced somewhat to the overall quality was the Swedish course (or the lack of a proper course, virtual course was not experienced to be anyway helpful). It was mentioned by seven respondents. Double Degree Students wished for closer co-operation between Åbo Akademi and Team Novia in order to organize courses. It was also experienced to be unfair that whenever a course was organized in English, that in the end local students got a permission to do written tasks in Swedish. Considering the fact that English is not the mother language for most of exchange students either this was seen to be something that should definitely change.

In order to know the most defining factor while thinking how successful the exchange time in Team Novia actually was, I was curious to know whether respondents would recommend Team Novia to other students in their home universities. Eight respondents answered yes, they would and two respondents said that most likely they would recommend, depending on the person. According to their thoughts Team Novia would suit best for a person that is open minded and ready to take responsibility of his/her own learning and progression. They would recommend Team Novia for persons who are willing to learn and make some effort in order to achieve their goals and get results.

One respondent said that he would definitely recommend a lot of stuff from Team Novia to be adapted in to his home university in Croatia. Otherwise he would also recommend his fellow students to come here but most likely they would not take that chance because there is no Erasmus program in use.

## 6.5 Free word of respondents

In the end of interview my last unofficial theme was called free word meaning that interviewees could freely tell all possible things they still would like to say which did not come up during the actual interview. I collected some of the comments given below and decided to leave my own comments directly after. This theme does not follow any line so it would be pretty pointless to analyze separately.

*“Because we were the first double degree students things has been a bit, well it is likely easier for the next ones. but we hope some things will improve in this double degree program and people would understand that we are a bit different than normal exchange students because we have more pressures and goals we need to achieve and we can't just party the whole year here.”*

All of the Double Degree Students were having the opinion that things are most likely going to be easier, better organized and in every way smoother for the next ones. They gave a lot of input in order to change things and improve the system. With the work they already did and the work that will be continued in Team Novia the Double Degree Program continues to develop further.

*“I think that Turku is one of the nicest cities in Finland so Novia could use it in marketing and to attract exchange students to come here. We have had a lot of spare time which was nice. On the other hand we could have learned a lot more if there would have been more school or teaching.”*

I totally agree with this statement. The certain kind of European atmosphere, which in my opinion exists here in Turku, could be highlighted stronger in Team Novia's marketing. The location does not make an institution any worse but it can affect very positively and in Team Novia's case the location could not be any better than it is at the moment in the center of Turku.

*“How well this system work might depend on also about your program what do you study. In youth work it is easier to work with refugees and so on.”*

This is a good point as well. Based on my own experiences as a Business Administration student I would say that the defining factor when planning projects or coming up with new project ideas was quite often money. Some projects (even the ones offered directly to

teams that does not happen too often) were rejected because there were not significant financial advantages promised or even possible to achieve. Perhaps the idea of “working for free” just does not fit together with the team of Business students. That depends a lot on the team.

On the contrary to this “money thinking” I would imagine that a team of for example Youth Work students think projects more as a whole and instead of money other things matter more for them. It is also easier to get companies to co-operate in case the money is not even required or the amount of money asked for compensation is relatively small.

*"I really like the tutors. I really feel like they are interested in us and that they care about their job. I like the couch system. They are very modest and it is easy to go talk to them."*

Not only coaches but also the work of international tutors was highly appreciated. This is certainly a thing that Team Novia should try to maintain in a level that it is now and continue along with the same path.

## 7 Analysis

Based on the interviews I have analyzed themes by using content analysis. The method of analysis is presented closer under chapter 4.1.1. I have looked for similarities and differences and mirrored them against previous researchers that are dealing with similar themes.

### 7.1 Extraordinary experiences and positive vibes

A research performed by Centre of International Mobility CIMO called "Why Finland?" (Hietaluoma 2001) is probably the most comprehensive study dealing with questions about Finland as an exchange destination. The research has its main focus on incoming exchange students' motives for going to student exchange and especially choosing Finland. The amount of respondents was all together 561 persons and despite the fact that research data was collected in 2000, most of it still seems to hold true. This can be seen when compared the motivating factors, expectations and choice of university between "Why Finland" and answers given by my respondents. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 5)

According to "Why Finland", the most mentioned reason for going to a student exchange was the personal growth. It was mentioned to be very important or quite important motivating factor by 90 % of all respondents. Also the will of getting to know a new country and new culture was mentioned by 80 % of respondents. In the same research even the want to travel was mentioned by over 60 % of respondents. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 22)

In the light of previous studies made about the same topic, the answers given by my respondents are pretty much in line with them. Every one of my respondents was having an expectation to make new friends and meet new people. I was expecting to get this answer, mostly because of my own experiences of a student exchange. Also CIMO's research information is supporting this factor. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 22)

Making new friends is a positive aspect that comes along with the exchange time, but it is usually not the main motivation. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 22) Half of my respondents said the main reason for their exchange time was the will and interest of discovering new places and culture. Three of them also wanted to travel and collect new experiences. I would say that this will of collecting new experiences and exploring things are tools in order to

achieve personal growth and development. Pure curiosity and open-minded attitude often makes it easier to face new experiences, also challenging ones.

Improvement of language skills was mentioned as a motivating factor and an expectation by four respondents. Especially English skills were seen to be important but also the interest towards new languages was brought up, as example Swedish skills would have been desirable to achieve. Language skills were also mentioned in CIMO's study where over 70 % of respondents had an opinion that learning a foreign language was motivating them to go abroad for an exchange. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 22)

Interest towards Scandinavia as well as towards Finland's education system can be interpreted to be partly a motivating factor when considering an exchange time (as it was named to be) but I would also link it together with the choice of university as is it clearly effecting to that choice as well. When respondents chose Team Novia, three of them were making the decision because of the country. The attraction of Finland was partly a reason also for four respondents who were particularly interested in Scandinavia. They chose Finland because there were no other Scandinavian countries to choose from. Team Novia as a study destination was also selected because *"it came automatically with the country"* meaning there were a partnership contract between Novia UAS and the exchange students' home universities. This was the case with six respondents.

One way or the other, my respondents were most attracted by the extraordinariness of Finland. Similar results can be found in CIMO's research: almost 80 % of respondents decided to come to Finland because of its culture, nature and style of living. Same kind of result was also achieved in Taajamo's research (2005). Also the curiosity towards educational aspects in Finland was mentioned as well as the general interest towards new studying styles but not in such a large scale as in CIMO's or Taajamo's researches. In 2001 almost 80 % of respondents were having educational matters and issues related to studies as the most important factor why they chose Finland. In Taajamo's research the high level of quality in Finnish education was highlighted. (Hietaluoma 2001, p. 24, Taajamo 2005, p. 34-35)

As it came up, Finland is a remarkable reason, motivation and even an expectation itself when exchange students chose their exchange destination. Because of this high level of interest I believe that the so called "Finland card" could be utilized stronger in Novia UAS's marketing. In the case of Team Novia even Turku as an attractive study location

could be highlighted more. Like one respondent told, also exchange students living here are having the opinion that there is a lively and student friendly atmosphere in Turku. Thanks to universities and the big amount of students as well as exchange students Turku can also be seen as a highly international city that has quite reasonable living costs in comparison with other cities in Finland. These positive aspects of Turku combined with the positive aspects of Team Novia can function quite effectively in order to attract exchange students.

As a matter of fact, when considering the general attraction level of Team Novia, the situation seems to have changed already completely compared to what it has been a few years ago. Team Novia's attractiveness level is already quite high as shown in respondents' answers considering the choice of university. That is to say that all of the respondents chose Team Novia as their first option.

Recommendations from other students and staff members at their home universities were the most important single factor influencing respondents' decision to come to Team Novia. Eight out of ten respondents said Team Novia was recommended to them. I consider this to be an important thing because clearly a verbal communication in the form of word of mouth marketing is gaining a foothold and working effectively for Team Novia's advantage. Of course Team Novia cannot directly control the message that students or staff members are going to tell forward but by ensuring that customers (in this case exchange students or staff members from partner universities) are satisfied with their experiences, Team Novia as an organization makes the most it can in order to keep the message positive. Verbal communication is potentially one of Team Novia's strongest marketing channels in the future and also the biggest challenge in terms of quality management. This quality point of view is considered closer under chapter 7.3.

Four respondents named the study method as a particular reason to choose Team Novia before I even asked it separately. The explanation for the interest was said to be curiosity and positive stories heard from others. It was extremely positive as well as important issue that all the respondents were informed about Team Learning beforehand and by that way the different character of studies should not have come as a (completely) surprise. I was assuming that it could have strongly effected on the experienced quality of an exchange time in case some respondents would not have been informed about Team Learning at all before arriving to Team Novia. Because of this assumption that I had before interviews I was very positively surprised when I heard that at least in theory all respondents were



having a clue what Team Novia is about and what kind of learning tools are applied in studies.

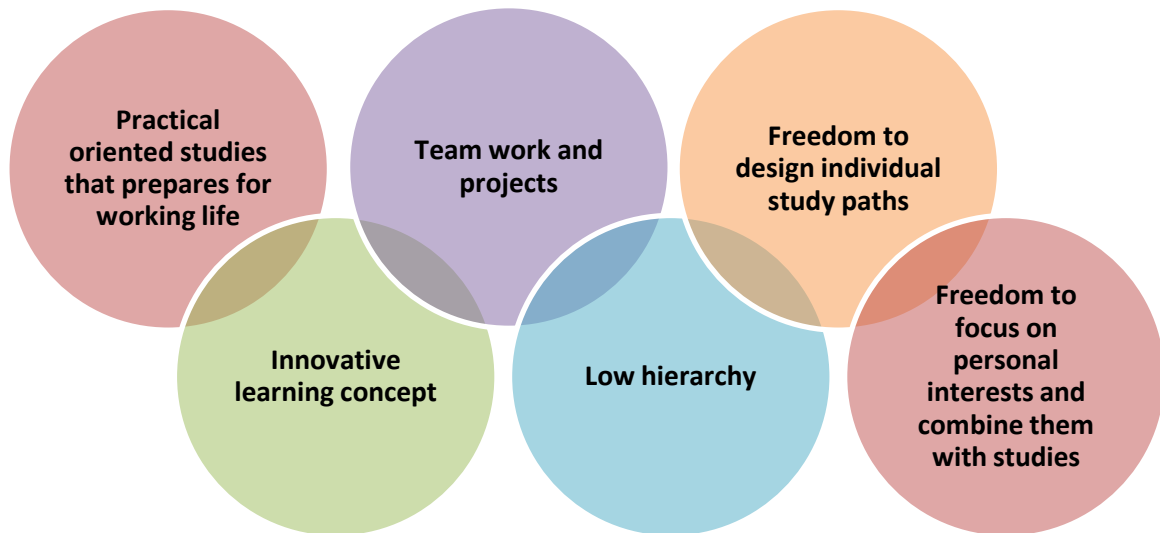
In reality the level of knowledge gained about Team Novia beforehand was varying quite a lot though. Part of respondents were very well informed about the system (pretty much as well as you can be before actual practical experience) while some were just told that Team Novia is "*something different*". Hopefully this lack of information can be fixed by offering partner universities clear enough marketing material in English as well as by keeping close contact with them. By using personal communication it is made sure that contact persons in partner universities have their information about Team Novia updated.

Why I found this beforehand-knowledge (or possible lack of it) so important is the quality aspect of this research. I was pretty sure that the awareness of Team Learning (and Team Novia's different character compared to more traditional study ways) may have a remarkable affect on expectations set to an exchange period as well on experiences and feelings respondents had afterwards. This point of view as well as the results of expectations and experienced quality will be discussed later on in this chapter under the chapter 7.3.

## **7.2 Team Learning – a developable concept**

As it came up in the interviews, there were plenty of positive things in Team Novia that respondents appreciated a lot. Also negative comments were given but most of the respondents had already figured out developing ideas in order to change these negative sides. I chose to handle this theme by building up a SWOT analysis as well as by gathering up ideas for follow-up activities. They are listed later on in this chapter.

The SWOT analysis is built on the basis of information gathered from interviews. In addition I have used some background information as well as observations I made during the thesis process. Like SWOT analysis in general, also this one is subjective and reflects both mine and respondents' thoughts about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that Team Novia has. Despite the quite high level of subjectivity, SWOT analysis can be used in order to perceive the whole picture of an object evaluated. It can be used as a guideline. (Berry n.d.)



*Figure 7: Strengths of Team Novia*

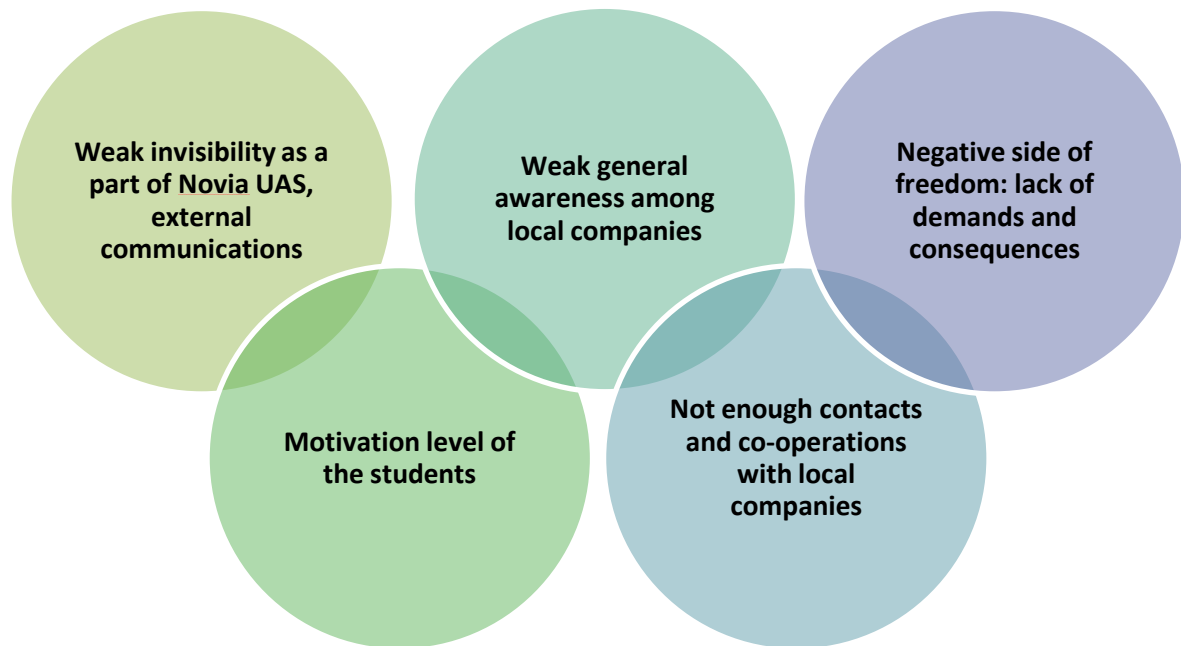
To start with the biggest strengths of Team Novia it is essential to name the unique character of studies. A practical point of view is applied to everything done in Team Novia. This is very different especially for students having background with upper secondary school education as well as for incoming exchange students who come to Team Novia to explore something new and exceptional.

Practical, working life oriented projects will give students the possibility to create valuable contacts as well as to train in practice the same skills students are going to need further on in their carrier.

Also the freedom to design individual study paths and participate in projects that cross the limits of degree programs are things that students have in Team Novia. It is not too common among other University of Applied Sciences in Finland and can work as an attractive factor especially for creative students who do not like the idea of being limited into certain course palettes and strict curriculums.

In my opinion these strengths can potentially make Team Novia stand out from the ground and achieve a good reputation in the Turku region as well as nationwide. In the best case Team Novia will achieve a status as an internationally recognized unit. The unique learning method based on Team Academy's model of Team Learning and co-operation

between students and companies is something that Team Novia is able to use as a differentiating factor in the competition between universities.



*Figure 8: Weaknesses of Team Novia*

The biggest weakness at the moment is most definitely the problems with motivation. 50 percent of respondents (five persons) named the general lack of motivation among students as a negative side of Team Novia. A suggestion to change that was to increase the level of demands and push so that students would have something that reminds them that things must be done in time. Respondents were suggesting that also coaches must consider their role and use the best tools in order to support their teams. They were having the opinion that for some teams it may be necessary to be strict and set up clear deadlines if it looks like the teams are not yet ready to take the responsibility of time management. Like one respondent said, the freedom (and that way responsibility) could be given to teams little by little when teams show development. The more you show capability of manage your work the more you are allowed to do it in the way you prefer to do it.

I agree with increasing some level of demands and consequences. Most likely they could be helpful but in my opinion there would be a need to try another way as well in order to get rid of low motivation level and general motivation problems. Instead of punishing students or increasing that much demands from the outside there should be ways in order to find the inner motivation. With the help of inner motivation students would demand

more of themselves (without an outsider forcing them to do so; this is not really consistent with the principles of Team Learning).

I believe that one potentially effective way in order to find the inner motivation is to encourage and motivate both students by increasing the team spirit. I think that through a strong team spirit also believe in the system will increase. When students self see the potential in Team Learning and see the advantages it has as a learning method, they start to work harder in order to get the most out of their study time. In practice this could mean for example a higher level of commitment in projects. The purpose of this motivating via team spirit is that all of the students would start to see projects as their chances to learn, not as something they have to do. In this context I refer to projects meaning also the so called "regular course work projects" that mean in practice also those projects that are not done in co-operation with any company but as a part of a certain course or module.

A strong team spirit and identity of Team Novia can even have affections in a broader scale. Motivated students and staff members that are proud of their university are likely to tell it to their friends, family and colleagues who will potentially tell the word forward. A significant input is also given to co-operation partners. Whenever projects are well done and both partners happy they are likely to recommend each other and use verbal communication as a marketing tool. This can also be seen as word of mouth marketing in the home field. Little by little the general awareness of the existence of Team Novia spreads.

In a positive scenario the increased awareness level and good reputation of Team Novia may then start a snowball effect that can lead to a point where even companies or associations owned by student teams in Team Novia will be well known. Of course this is possible already at the moment with the help of active marketing and enthusiastic attitude teams have. However, to build up a company from scratch and make it well known and profitable in three years (within the regular studying time) is quite a challenge and that is why I see it as the best scenario that teams can achieve.

Another weakness that should be looked at closely and to find solutions in order to change it is the lack of partners in the business field. In this context partners refers to local companies and organizations in the Turku area. Within organizations Team Novia has connections via Novia UAS but the general awareness among local companies (especially among Finnish-speaking companies) in Turku as well as in nearby areas should be

increased. The business field in Turku area must know the answer to questions "What is Team Novia?" and "How can it be useful for us?"

In my opinion Team Novia needs concrete partnerships and co-operations that work actively and are mutually beneficial. An example of a partnership could be a company that does business in a certain field, let us say a HR-company. They could co-operate with Team Novia by participating in the practical implementation of for example a HRM module. The company would send lecturers to Team Novia to tell about HRM in practice and introduce how they are doing their work in the company. Preferably students could visit the company and experience and see things there. As a return this co-operation company achieves free publicity and a possibility to find motivated interns or permanent employees who are interested in working in the company.

Based on my own experiences as a first year business student I would say that especially in the beginning of studies in Team Novia student teams could use of some help in order to "get off the ground". I think that teams could start the business and make things happen a bit more effectively from the beginning on when they would have certain companies whom to turn to when planning projects. In the beginning it could help when students would know that they actually have these companies that are likely interested in to cooperate with them and are already familiar with Team Novia.

I think this would be helpful despite the fact that Team Novia is highlighting the responsibility and activity from the students' side in order to find projects. I find it important as well but I also believe that the own-initiative and courage to contact companies increases as the time passes and students get used to Team Learning. This kind of "call that company" kind of advice would suit to first year teams but not the ones who have studied one year or longer because they already have the knowledge and skills needed in order to make things happen.

Despite the idea presented above or the actual need of it the fact still is that it would be useful for everyone to make some efforts in order to make Team Novia more visible in Turku. By fixing this issue Team Novia opens up lots of new opportunities to grow and develop.

Another issue that can be seen as a weakness at the moment is the visibility of Team Novia as a part of Novia UAS. Despite the fact Team Novia has very nicely designed and informative homepage (that needs just a bit of fixing for the English version) it is difficult

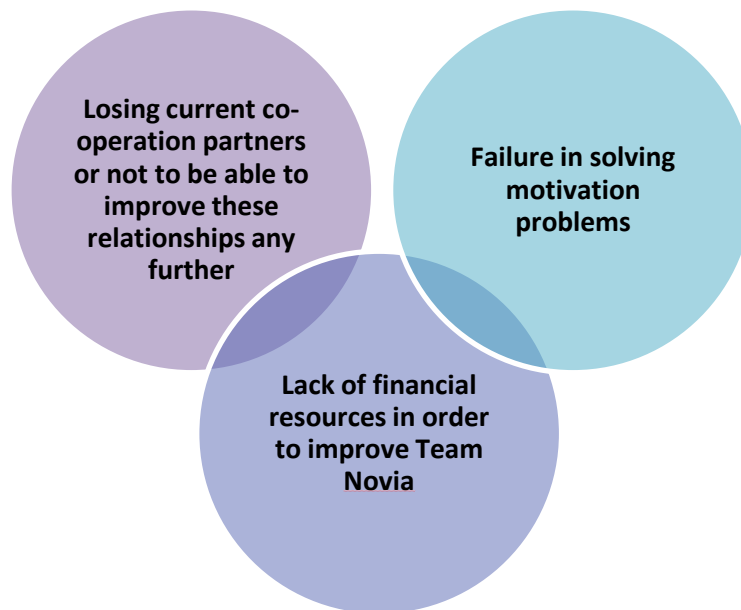
to find on Novia UAS' website. The link that leads to Team Novia's homepage is almost hidden under general information about Degree Programs that are offered in Turku Campus. A reader visiting the pages cannot link Team Learning and Team Novia by anyway without accidentally clicking the link and visiting Team Novia's homepages. This is not the fault of Team Novia in any way but absolutely a thing that need to be changed because Team Novia is linked into Novia UAS though. It can be summarized that external communications of Novia UAS could need some help at the moment.



*Figure 9: Opportunities of Team Novia*

The opportunities listed are closely connected to the general situation. By eliminating weaknesses and turning those into strengths Team Novia can achieve a lot. There are many possibilities in the air and hopefully tools to make them concrete. An opportunity that is not utilized in a way it should is the co-operation between international partner universities that Team Novia has. There could be a lot more international projects organized and that way the level of internationalization would increase. In order to involve students in these international projects it should be important to make projects easily available, interesting and possible to attend also without leaving the home campus (unless students have the interest to do so). Instead of increasing the international relations between staff members (which is naturally important as well) some of the study trips and projects could be meant for students too. This claim is only based on my own observations but I say there are willing students to go: give them a chance to travel abroad for a relatively short time

period, let us say from one week to three weeks in order to work in an international project and get credits from it and they do go. The opportunity to attend shorter projects can activate the ones who would not otherwise be willing to leave for one reason or another.



*Figure 10: Threats of Team Novia*

The main threat for Team Novia I could think of is the lack of financing. Most likely the financing is closely connected to the valuation that Team Novia has in the eyes of main echelon of Novia UAS. Because of the challenging economical situation we are facing in Finland it is possible that even a high level of valuation may not be enough in order to find enough finance for Team Novia. If you ask me, Team Novia has every premise needed in order to develop according to its vision and become a learning unit that educates new entrepreneurs. It would be a shame to mess up this chance. Entrepreneurship is also difficult to build up without actual projects with companies and because of that I see it as relevant to mention again the importance of good connections between Team Novia and local companies. There are not too many partners (at least active ones) at the moment either but Team Novia must absolutely not lose the ones it has. It is a potential threat that will hopefully never come true.

### 7.3 There is still room for improvement

It was encouraging to notice that respondents were very satisfied with their experiences in Team Novia despite some problems and disappointments on the way. *“Everything was really weird at the beginning but we managed it and in the end everything was good.”*

The experienced quality was seen to be in balance with expectations set before the exchange time. Like discussed under chapter 3.3 "Service quality management", this balance is the key when taking care of customer satisfaction. The overall quality is usually experienced to be good when promises given are not too high and that way expectations are realistic and correspond with the experiences gained. (Grönroos 2009, p. 105)

In general respondents were having the opinion that they achieved pretty much all things they originally came here for: they met new people, had unique experiences, improved their understanding about a new culture and country and developed their professional skills. Though for some respondents these professional skills were not the ones they had expected: instead of theoretical knowledge the skills gained in Team Novia were more connected to personal growth and practical skills. Respondents told they improved for example their team working skills and presentation skills. What was the most significant and the best possible thing to hear was the fact that nobody regrets his/hers choice to come to Team Novia. It is encouraging information when planning the activities for the future.

The thing that was influencing negatively to the overall quality of several respondents was the lack of Swedish course for beginners. It may not seem to be that a big deal but it sure is in case you are promised to learn a new language (that was promised for German students, not by Team Novia but apparently due to a misunderstanding) and in the end it was not possible because nobody was organizing the course. In this situation expected quality was higher than experienced quality. Because of this negative experience (that was partly caused because of unrealistic expectations) the overall quality may have been seen more negative than it would have been seen without this language course problem that was letting respondents down. In order to avoid the same kind of disappointments with next Double Degree Students and exchange students Team Novia must double check the information that is given to partnership universities and what they are telling forward to their students before students come to Team Novia. Team Novia must also organize the Swedish course for real and luckily this improvement has already been made starting the autumn 2014.



## **7.4 Issues to be considered concerning internationalization work in Team Novia**

Interviewees presented valuable opinions, statements and concrete developing ideas that can be applied in the future in order to improve whole Team Novia. It also came up plenty of solutions to the question "What should be done in order to improve studying in Team Novia from an incoming exchange student's point of view?" These ideas must be taken seriously.

However, when it comes to internationalization, in my opinion there are some essential questions to be asked and carefully considered before any future internationalization operations are put in practice.

Does Team Novia truly want to become an international learning unit? It is important to think thoroughly whether Team Novia has the common will, interest and resources to develop it in order to become an international learning unit that is implementing a unique learning system in practice. At the moment I would say that Team Novia is developing towards an international learning unit but is not really in the point yet where it could refer itself as a one.

What I mean by this is the fact that it should not be underestimated that internationalization process demands a lot of input both from the organization's side as well as customers' side. In this context organization refers to academic staff in Team Novia and concerns everybody from administration level to professors and couches. By customer I mean students at Team Novia. In order to increase the appreciation of international activities and international atmosphere, the power of internal marketing should be utilized in a larger scale that is done at the moment. In the same way than in increasing the motivation level, also in order to increase the appreciation of internationalization everyone in Team Novia should believe in it and think it is an important thing that is worth developing further.

Is Team Novia willing to follow the international strategy and principles of Novia UAS and actively willing to increase and later on maintain the internalization?

*“Our objective is to offer students and personnel an international study environment through internationalization at home and abroad, to promote tolerance and understanding and to develop abilities to work in an international environment.” (Yrkeshögskolan Novia 2014, b)*

Considering the strategic goal of Novia UAS, Internationalization should belong to everybody in some kind of form - basically whether they want it or not. I believe it would help every student and staff member when internationalization and international contacts would be started to be seen as possibilities to learn new things as well as something normal that is a natural part of studying, teaching and learning. In that way "the step to take" in order to activate yourself in to international action would be a lot lower and people would start to think internationalization as a thing that "we do together" instead of "the ones who are interested in it may activate themselves and may go for example to an exchange".

Is internationalization in Team Novia taken seriously enough taking into account its role as a vision of Novia UAS? In the vision of Novia UAS it is said that Novia UAS wants to be internationally recognized. Increasing and maintaining internationalization and achieve recognition among other universities and educational institutes is not possible without active internationalization work. This work is not possible to do without a staff that is interested in international contacts and motivated to give their own contribution into this development work of internationalization. By using the term staff in here I do not mean only those couple of persons working among international issues but the whole staff working in Team Novia. There must be a real will to take part into international projects and be ready to communicate in English both in class and outside class. Of course this point also includes the students.

In general, courses taught/led/done in English are as well a way of involving local students to use foreign language in practice. While working in projects and learning new thing students can increase their international skills and competencies. An essential part of these courses should be the cross-cultural communication which means in practice that courses need exchange students in order to function for everyone's best. Without an actual need to speak a foreign language it is likely that local students do not have any interest to do so. In my opinion it could also be helpful to give the local students somewhat possibilities to choose which courses they would like to study in English: perhaps personal could discuss together with students and plan which courses should be organized in English (for example in the next semester) and which would be better to organize in Swedish. In practice this possibility to choose and influence can be impossible to do though due to organizational issues and for example contracts with partnership universities that may demand that certain courses are offered in English every academic year which cannot be changed.

Another issue I still want to point out is the question about the management support. If we suppose that internationalization will be invested in, does Team Novia have enough significance to the echelon of Novia UAS in order to make sure that motivated staff remains motivated? Like I concluded above, it is crucial that the staff is committed to internationalization and gives a positive example to the students. It is not very motivating though in case the main organization of Novia UAS is not ready to support internationalization work in Team Novia. This support can in practice mean for example financial support as well as decision-making powers given to Team Novia itself in international projects they want to put into practice.

## **7.5 Follow-up activities for the short-term future**

Based on suggestions, thoughts and ideas already presented in this thesis, I would like to gather up the most essential of them as a list. This list can work as a tool when considering the next developments done in Team Novia.

- Organize Swedish course for exchange students or make an agreement with an institution that organizes it (This point has already put in to practice!)
- Increase the amount of international activities such as international projects organized both in the home field as for example abroad in co-operation with foreign partner universities
- Involve every incoming exchange student and Double Degree Student as a part of a team in order to
  1. Improve their integration to Team Novia (the feeling of togetherness, interaction with local students)
  2. Improve intercultural communication skills of every team member
- Consider changes in practices that may influence negatively to the motivation of students (for example the necessity and amount of paper work required, project hour system, concreteness of deadlines, the policy with consequences etc.)
- Create new contacts and partnership with local organizations and companies and strengthen the ones already existing

When it comes to internationalization there are many ways to improve it further on. Based on my opinion as well as ideas that came up in interviews I recommend Team Novia to invest in internationalization possibilities in the home field. There are incoming exchange students who are willing to integrate as a part of student teams – it means a lot to them and creates a multicultural environment for every team member. The best way to train your international competencies and cross-cultural communication skills is to do it all the time in practice. Why not utilize this opportunity further by organizing teams so that there is at least one exchange student involved and of course participating into every activity as a regular team member. This requires organization, adaption and open minded attitude from everybody but is most likely worth it in the end. At least respondents who had an opportunity to experience this kind of arrangement were the most satisfied of them all.

## 8 Concluding discussion

This chapter will tie this thesis together and offer a short summary of the work, a critical review as well as my own reflection about this thesis work and my experiences about Team Novia.

### 8.1 Summary of research

In summary it can be concluded that from incoming exchange students point of view Team Learning as a learning method was experienced to be something different, interesting and positive. It was highlighted by respondents that Team Novia as a learning unit has plenty of potential to develop further on – with the help of some improvements made. Even respondents who could not imagine spending their whole time studying in Team Novia were appreciating the experience and time they spent here.

Respondents chose Team Novia partly because of its location in exotic Finland and partly because of the interest they had towards the learning method. These two things together effected strongly to the final decision and especially “the Finland card” and Nordic location could be highlighted in marketing focused on incoming exchange students. Team Learning could be marketing as an alternative way to experience the Finnish education.

Most positive factors in the method were seen to be practical orientation and team work which both prepare students for actual working life and challenges they will face in the future. Negative factors in Team Learning were named to be motivation problems and lack of demands and consequences. Exchange students and especially Double Degree Students would also really appreciate a language teaching in Swedish in order to be able to train their language skills with locals and help them to integrate deeper into a part of the campus community. Luckily this negative factor is likely going to change positive soon due to the new Swedish course for foreigners.

Respondents were satisfied with their time and happy they chose Team Novia instead of some other university. Despite negative factors the positive ones were experienced to be stronger and the overall quality of the exchange time was seen to be good or excellent. In order to improve the quality even further there is a need to pay attention to external marketing and control the information incoming students are receiving before arriving to Team Novia. In the ideal situation incoming exchange students have realistic expectations

which Team Novia is slightly able to surpass. That way the quality experience is maximized and students return back their home universities happy and potentially willing to perceive favorable word of mouth marketing.

## 8.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability in a qualitative research is not as easily interpretable as in quantitative research where it is simply defined as the following: *"Reliability describes the ability of a research method to give non-random results."* In other words the repeatability is as high as possible and answers would look more or less the same if research would be conducted directly after the first one. (Virtuaaliammattikorkeakoulu n.d.)

In qualitative research the truthfulness of material does not really matter in that sin, because the research and analysis focuses on just the material at hand. The data is what it is and represents only answers given by certain individuals and it is thus very subjective. However, the reliability can be observed through the objectivity. The researcher must not mix his/hers own beliefs, values or attitudes with objects of research. Instead, the job of researcher is to listen and understand point of views that interviewees tell as well as try to interact with them without influencing answers given. (Tilastokeskus n.d.)

Validity of a research is usually more important in qualitative research as reliability (which in the case of qualitative research is often a subjective interpretation). Validity tells whether research has managed to achieve its goals and whether it has answered the research questions. Researcher has a significant role in order to make sure the validity is satisfactory. Information collected in research depends on questions asked in interviews. If interview questions are not well prepared, the material collected may not serve its original purpose. It is also possible that results can be interpreted in a wrong way. This can happen for example if researcher does not understand given answers in a same way as interviewees mean them. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006)

In my opinion the validity of this research is good. Respondents understood questions (or asked in case they were not sure about the meaning) and gave variable answers. I have an impression that a theme interview was an effective tool to use in this research. My opinion is based on the fact that many respondents added additional comments and observations into discussion which was the original meaning as well. These comments and observations are very valuable information and by using a theme interview it was possible to let

interviewees speak freely so they could tell about the things they personally felt important to mention.

### **8.3 Critical review**

After taking a critical glance into the thesis, I have come up with some matters I could have done differently. To start with the interviews, I am very satisfied with a broad and comprehensive material gained, but I believe it would have been smart to practice the actual interview situation beforehand with an outsider who has nothing to do with the actual research. Despite of that I do not see the lack of experience as an interviewer to be a particularly adverse factor while considering the reliability of this research (closer look into questions about reliability and validity will be taken under chapter 7.2). I think so because I was lucky to have very open and talkative respondents who were not distracted by the possible nervousness of the interviewer. During the first two interviews I made I was quite nervous and probably talking too much about my personal point of views and experiences. On the other hand it was necessary to create a relaxed atmosphere where respondents felt they could speak up freely. One thing I could have done differently was the interview base. It could have been clearer from the beginning on and for example terms and words used in it are not exactly same I have used in this written thesis (though meanings are same of course).

An important issue that has effected to the point of view in this thesis is my own background as a Business Administration student. It may see in the references related to Team Novia's practices or issues that I have mentioned to be "general". It has to be noticed that what I see as a general way of working may actually be general only in my Degree Program because it is the one I have experienced. Other Degree Programs in Team Novia have their own ways of working and these ways may vary quite a lot between programs. I have discussed about this matter briefly during the work but it is good to mention once more.

Another thing that has presumably affected the answers given is the educational background of respondents. Out of ten respondents eight were studying business and only two respondents studied tourism management. None of respondents studied civic activity and youth work. With a different variation of educational background the results could have been totally different. Though this same logic can be applied to the cultural

background or even the individual character of respondents; in principle the results gained could have been totally upside down in case the respondents would have been different.

## 8.4 Reflection

Writing this Bachelor's Thesis has been an educative experience. I have learned a lot about the whole writing process as well as expand my understanding about the topic. It has been interesting to find out more about Team Learning and the theoretical basis of it as well as to hear respondents' views and experiences. During the thesis process I have naturally reflected my own experiences about Team Learning to the ones respondents had. Most of the results that were gained from interviews; both positive and negative aspects, remind me about my own feelings and thoughts I had in the beginning of my studies in Team Novia.

As I started in Team Novia in autumn 2011, I was very confused with the whole Team Learning and how it felt so different compared to my previous view of education and how it was organized. All new ways of doing and thinking, new learning tools (especially training sessions felt strange) and a new freedom and a responsibility that I needed to take were quite a lot to process before I started to understand how the system actually works. This understanding did not come quickly but developed during my whole study time.

During my exchange time in Germany I experienced a very different kind of learning style and culture. I was afraid that studying in there would have been too theoretical but to my luck I was experiencing courses that a German student would probably describe as free or at least very teamwork orientated. Personally I see that the courses were not teamwork orientated but lots of group work we had instead which was very pleasant and according to my understanding not very usual in obligatory courses that are traditionally based on lectures and literature studies. I won't continue with more generalizing but just saying that I believe I experienced quite a non-theoretical study time in Germany (compared to what many local students seemed to have).

The time abroad in general grew me a lot as an individual and I find it to be a very good thing that I now have experiences about Team Learning as well as from more traditional kind of higher education. This mix has been a good thing for me and I believe that also incoming exchange students as well as Double Degree Students can get a lot by studying a semester or two in Team Novia.



What I have developed the most during my study time in Team Novia and what is most likely the biggest strength I am able to utilize in the future working life is my social skills as well as team work skills. Team Learning has improved my presentation and speaking skills as well as my language skills a lot. I am sure these are particularly the skills that would have not improved so much in case I would have chosen another university or another learning method. It is hardly a coincidence that same skills were mentioned to be improved also by respondents and the social character of studies in Team Novia was highlighted to be one of its biggest advantages.

Now, after I am finished with this long thesis project and writing these last words, lots of nice memories about my study time in Team Novia has come to my mind. At this very moment though, just before I am about to hand in this work, the uppermost thought in my mind is relief. I can be happy after managing to create a piece of work that provides valuable information. I am satisfied with the end result and happy with the fact that also my client appreciates the final work and sees it as a useful source of information that can be utilized in the future.

So of course I am happy to finish this long project I have had. On the other hand I am also curious to know and see what will happen in the future. There are some other issues related to my research topic that could be researched closer, for example external and internal marketing of Team Novia. Perhaps some other students can find ideas for their projects or even for thesis works based on this one. I think this thesis process has managed pretty well in its purpose to wake up an inner researcher in me and to offer an insight how to conduct a research. One way or the other, at least my understanding about applied research has developed a lot and I have got new competencies that I am able to use in my future working life.

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**Interview base****1. Motives and expectations for the exchange period**

Why did you decide to go abroad?

What kinds of expectations you had for your exchange time? (Language skills, new experiences, new people and friends, international competencies..?)

**2. Choice of university**

Why did you choose Novia University of Applied Sciences and Team Novia?

Did you know about the team based learning style before you came here?

**3. Team based learning system**

Do you like the team based learning style? Why? Why not?

Based on your experiences, name pros and cons with the system.

Would you like to have a same kind of learning method in your home university?

Team learning is all about communication and interaction. Do you feel there is enough interaction between international students and Finnish students?

If not, how would you improve it?

Do you think it is good to have courses with different groups or would you prefer to have one group and have most of the courses together with them?

What kinds of developing ideas you have concerning team based learning style?

What about concerning studies in overall?

**4. Expectations vs. experienced quality**

All in all, do you feel like your exchange time has met your expectations? (Yes because.../Why not?)

Influence of Team Novia to previous question.

Would you recommend an exchange time in Team Novia to others?

**5. Free word**

Is there anything else you would like to comment/tell/say...?

**Appendices****Appendix 2****List of interviewees****Double Degree Students**

Alina Schuler

Elisabeth Kügel

Janina Maier

Marie-Sophie Rapp

**Exchange Students**

America Hernández González

Jennifer Serrano

Juliana Romain

Kevin Djalil

Luka Krolo

Pablo Rodríguez Rubio